MURDER AT FULL MOON

PETER PYM

John Steinbeck's unpublished thriller!

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FULL

MOON

Peter Pym

FROM THE MIND OF
AMERICA'S GREATEST WRITER

For almost a century, this book has been suppressed by the Stienbeck estate. For the first time ever, it has been made available to the public.

1

It happened at the Unger farm, in the fifty acre expanse of rich grazing pasture almost on the edge of Lucida Swamp. The night was warm and dark, its heavy silence broken only by the hum of insects, the chirping of crickets, and the occasional deep-throated croak of a bullfrog off in the swampland. Suddenly, the shadowed outline of a human figure appeared at the edge of a cypress grove behind the weather-beaten Unger house, and a soft, stifled signal

rode the still night air. It was a whistle imitative of a barred owl's call, but to a trained ear awake in the late hour it was distinctively higher in pitch and refined in burr.

For a long moment there was no response, then a door at the rear of the house opened quietly and a girl crossed into the cypress grove, her eyes searching the darkness.

"Nick?" she called softly.

"Right here, Daisy." The figure stepped into the starlight. His face had a simian quality, and he was too tall to have squatted in any of the bushes without muddying his green or blue overalls, paled by the full moon.

“Nick, you shouldn’t have come. He’s in one of his dark moods tonight. I gotta go right back in. He’ll kill me if he finds me here.”

She tried to turn, but he grabbed her arm.

“He won’t kill nobody. I’m gettin’ fed up with him ruinin’ your life, Daisy. Got a mind to tell you a thing or two.” There was booming passion in his whisper, as if he were cursing the world and everything in it, but resolved to hold his mistrust close to his chest.

“It won’t do any good, Nick.” She brushed his hand away, and coyly averted her eyes like a cat that has grown weary of its own tricks.

“What right’s he got keepin’ you from gettin’ some fun outta livin’? That’s what I wanna know.”

“He’s my brother,” she intoned.

"That don't give him no right to pin ya up. You ain't one of his stinkin' sheep." He gestured broadly. It was too dark to discern where the flock may roam.

"Nick, please, not so loud. He'll hear ya."

"I don't much care if he does."

"Please, Nick. I'll be the one to suffer."

A crow sang its cacophonous song, the meaning of which is lost on human ears, then flapped away from its homely branch, leaving a hard silence in its wake.

Nick broke it.

"I'm sorry, Daisy, but it makes me mad clean through when I think of him treatin' ya the way he does. I wanna marry you, Daisy, and take you away from here. There's stories goin' 'round the village."

"Whatdaya mean, Nick?"

“Ah, I don’t like to tell ya, Daisy, but the folks’re talkin’ about your brother, Rupert.”

“Tal-king?” She said the word as if she had never heard it before. “I don’t understand.”

“Well, Bert Penelly and Bill Mason come through here night before last huntin’ coon, said they saw Rupert in the east pasture—diggin’ a grave.”

“A grave?” Daisy seemed scandalized. The very word made her skin crawl, and her legs quake like gelatin.

“Yeah, he’s buryin’ somethin’. You know what it was, Daisy, got any idea?”

“No. I don’t know. But—”

“But what?”

"Shouldn't be tellin' ya this, Nick." Her eyes met his for a brief moment, then she looked away. She felt foolish.

"It won't go no further than me, Daisy."

"Promise?"

"Hope to die." His tender voice soothed her like a drug.

"Well I—I heard Rupert talkin' with the hired hand. I heard him say something comes out of the swamp at night."

"Out of the swamp?"

"They don't know what it is, but when it comes out, Rupert hardly never goes without his shotgun."

"Sounds like hoo-doo to me, Daisy. I gotta take you away from here. It ain't healthy."

“But you can’t, Nick—not until I’m eighteen. Not for two months.”

“How am I gonna sit around for two months thinking about you shut up in that house with that crazy man?”

“You got no right to say that.” She says it as if he had made a bad joke.

“I got every right. Diggin’ graves at night; buryin’ Lord knows what; talkin’ about things comin’ out of the swamp. I oughta say something to him about all this.”

“Say it right now.” Like an apparition, he silently commanded the cloud of darkness to reveal his gruesome face. His voice was embittered, registering like an age-worn Cain revolting against God’s curse after years of torment.

Rupert did expect an answer. He scarcely drew a breath as he gave Nick ample time to fuddle, dumbfounded and witless. “Get back into the house, Daisy.” His eyes did not leave Nick as he spoke.

“Hold on a minute, Mr. Unger.”

Rupert locked eyes with his waifish sister, then intoned her, “Get into the house.”

“I’m goin’, Rupert.” A deluge of sweet, salty tears crowded her face as she bid her farewell, turning slowly like the hands of a rusted clock. “Bye Nick.”

Nick reached out into the misty night air. “Daisy, wait.”

“Let her go,” Rupert growled.

“You have no right to treat her like you do.”

“I’ve got a right to do as I please. She’s my sister and she’s underage. Now, get off my land and don’t come back. If I catch you again, I’ll horsewhip you.”

A sudden rush of defiance intoxicated Nick. “I don’t scare easy, Mr. Unger.”

“No? Perhaps I’ve something in the house that may change your mind. I’ll give you five minutes to get off my land.”

The boy scoffed, “I’ll leave when I’m good and ready, and not before.”

The youth’s resistance failed to phase the hardened exterior that Rupert wore like a glove. Without a change in the tempo of his bitter tone he snarled, “I’m going indoors for a shotgun. And if you’re still here when I come out again, I’ll fuck you up like the son of a bitch you are. Remember that.”

Rupert heeled around in one swift motion, then marched toward and up the wooden steps of his gothic house. It was a black thing lit by oil light. Two stories. The great black slammed Rupert.

Nick stood in a wild silence for a fleeting moment.

“Dirty, low-down skunk,” Nick declared to himself. “If he tries pointing his damn rifle at me, I’ll beat his ugly head off. Let’s watch him try.”

Just then, an ululation that nightmares are made of sounded through the farm. It was an ungodly howl that made Nick’s heart stand still for a moment.

“What the—that sounded like a wolf.” He startled back. “Easy now.” It drew closer. “Don’t come closer.” It approached. He managed a slew of chopped

vocalizations as the last remaining breaths left his body and the wolf claimed his soul in blood.

The California wind blew faint elegy that only the full moon would hear.

In his last breath, the young lad recited a song:

"Weep, weep, you Argonauts
Bewail the day
That first to fatal Troy
You took your way
Weep, weep, you Argonauts!"

Then silence.

2

"I'm afraid I have nothing to tell you, Professor Naylor, except that it happened five weeks ago." Sergeant Casey—decked out in full uniform—slumped in his leather-padded chair behind his oak-wood desk as he spoke.

He had a stogie stuck between his teeth, and he seemed intent to smoke it until it no longer resembled one. His voice reflected this habit. Like Benjamin Franklin or Fatty Arbuckle, he was a

comically bloated man. It was a wonder that his leather-padded chair did not cease to stand beneath his mammoth blubber. Upon meeting him, one had an instinct to remove one's handkerchief and run it along his upper lip, because his mustache resembled a smudge of tar. Behold a gross entity; a block of lard blessed (or, perhaps, cursed) with motion and sometimes thought.

"The police moved in on the case right after the boy's body was found. We didn't get very far," the sergeant continued.

The man opposite his desk, to whom the sergeant was addressing was Professor Naylor. He was an old man clothed in the blandest tweed. Atop his aquiline nose sat a pair of spectacles dressed in a peculiar shade of rosy red. His gray hair combed over, his

frame thin and wispy, his posture ram-rod straight. On his left hand, a rusty class ring. No wedding band was visible. The crotch of his pants swelled with a bulge indicating that he carried a massive man-package or a lengthy revolver. Neither seemed likely by the sight of him, but it had to be one of the two, or perhaps both.

"I see. You know, of course, why I'm here, sergeant," he finally spoke in a grandfatherly tone that could soothe a savage breast.

"Well, all I know is we got a letter from the state university saying you were coming down for some research on the case." The sergeant produced a piece of paper that appeared to be covered in semen, and waved it in the air.

"Yes, yes, exactly—and the name of the university is Stanford. It's a very famous school. The great writer John Steinbeck went there. Now, as I understand it, sergeant, the boy's throat was considerably lacerated?"

"Worse than that. There was no throat left." The sergeant slipped the piece of paper back in its assigned drawer, then pantomimed what he had just said.

"You're convinced it was an animal?"

"What else could it be? No human could rip a throat open like that."

"Were there any tracks?" the professor inquired. At this point in the conversation, he had begun to pace around the room in a small but adequate circle. He appraised the numerous paintings that adorned

the four walls of the sergeant's office. All the paintings were in the classical style, depicting Roman sentries, gladiators, and emperors in their natural state. *This man sure has an affinity for the male figure*, the professor thought to himself. *Alas, these homoerotic works all appear to be blatant forgeries*, *which is quite comical*.

"No, the ground was pretty hard," Sergeant Casey, who was apparently gay, answered. "What stopped us cold was that our bloodhounds could not pick up a trace of scent."

"What about *humans*?"

"Only the Ungers and the hired man, Amos—but they don't count. It happened on the Unger ranch, and naturally you'd expect—"

"Yes, yes, of course," the professor agreed. "There is absolutely no way that it could have been any of them, and we are both right about this. Now, tell me, this Unger you mentioned—"

"His name is Rupert."

"I don't remember asking," the professor snapped at the lard. "Now, this Rupert that you mentioned. Does he keep a dog? A *savage* dog?"

"No," Casey said. "There aren't any dogs in Cone City. Everyone here is allergic to them, for some reason. I think it's because of inbreeding, but that's just my own personal theory. I'm not a scientist like you are."

"No, you certainly aren't. Now, why don't you tell me where the Unger farm is located? I'd much rather like to get a survey of the scene myself."

"It happens to be located on the outskirts of town, professor, by the Lucida Swamp. You can get there by the county road. I'll drive you in my automobile if you're up for it." Casey winked.

The professor sensed a deluge of vomit percolating in his esophagus. He quickly excused himself to the lavatory where he ralphed his guts out for several minutes then ralphed some more. He was an old man who had lived a long life, and never had he ralphed like that before. After he was done ralphing, he washed his hands with soap and water, then left the lavatory. After he left the lavatory, he reentered Casey's office.

"Well, how about my offer?" Casey beamed.

"I'd like to know a few more things, first," Professor Naylor managed to say, clearly exhausted. "The boy. Did he work at the Unger farm?"

"No, no, no. According to Unger's story, the boy, Nick, had a wild crush of young lust over the Unger girl, Daisy. On Tuesday, the two young lusters had a rendezvous under the eaves of the full moon, until Rupert rained on their lust parade. He says that Nick left the farm around nine-thirty. A minute later, he heard him screaming for help. Rupert ran out from the back of the house, found Nick dead along the traveler's road. Blood and guts littered everywhere as if the gore circus came to town."

"I'd like to have a real talk with this Unger man."

The sergeant's stogie was sufficiently decimated, so he disposed of it. He reached into a drawer for his

pack, produced another stogie, reached into another drawer for his lighter, then lit his second stogie. All these things seemed to be covered in semen, by the way.

"I don't know, professor," he responded. "He's a hard, brooding man who doesn't take much to strangers. He doesn't take much to anybody as a matter of fact. You might even call him a 'queer duck'."

"Really?"

"He spends most of his time taking care of his farm and his sheeps. He keeps one hired mana—Amos, whom I despise because he is a Negro and I am racist. For the two of them, they manage the farm pretty well. Then, there's his young sister, Daisy, whom the young boy, Nick, was lusting after. Rupert doesn't let her out of his sight. Pretty much keeps her

cooped up in the house like Rapunsel. She doesn't have long blonde hair like Rapunsel though. She has dark hair, and it's about the average length a young girl would wear—"

"I get the point sergeant," Naylor informed. "I think I'll take you up on your offer. How about we drive up to the farm tonight?"

"Tonight? It'll be dark if we go there at night."

"You're not afraid of the dark, are you?"

Sergeant Casey tightened his belt against his rotund waist. "I'm not afraid of anything I can see. What time?"

Professor Naylor gazed at his golden watch. The hands were Steamboat Willie's gloves. It said noon, but the watch was always four hours behind, so

it was really four o'clock. "It's four o'clock. We'll convene at eight."

3

Professor Naylor gazed at his golden watch again. It said two, so it was really six. Just about time for *Night Creeps* starring Bill Pratt. He was lumbering in the single bed of the hotel room Sergeant Casey had rented out for him. The Rising Sun Inn, it was called. He stayed in room number twelve.

He had been driving up the beaten path to this inn a mere two hours before when the sky commenced rainfall. His jalopy had no roof, and he

had no parasol handy, so tragedy occurred. The tragedy, of course, was him getting wet from the rain. The inn looked like a Japanese temple. Its roof curved thin like the beak of a bird whom was knocked on its back. Unlike the robin red and stark black temples, though, this hotel was doused in a ridiculous shade of blue not unlike the color found on the plumes of a jaybird. It was dropped against an army of the most unremarkable redwoods. There was a grove off a ways, where he parked his jalopy beneath the refuge of long branches, lest it stay out in the rain.

He pulled his hat close to his head and made a crazy dash to the big brown doors of the hotel.

Once at the doors, he entered the lobby dripping.

"Oh, you pig, sir! You dog! You are dripping, sir!" the innkeeper behind the desk harked in utter duress.

She walked out from behind the desk and confronted him.

"Why are you dripping, sir?"

"I am dripping because of the rain."

"Could you drip somewhere else?"

"Well, I could, ma'am, but I have a room that was booked here by Sergeant Casey earlier today. My name is Naylor."

"Oh," she said. Her face shot deathly pale with humiliation. "Goodness," she continued. She begged profusely for his forgiveness. "Please, forgive me. I hadn't a clue. If I had known it was you, I would not have burst out in such a brash and abrasive manner. Is there any way I can make it up to you? Perhaps I could offer you something."

He cocked an eyebrow. “What would you be willing to do?”

“Oh, I’d do *anything*.”

He raised both eyebrows this time, and even bit his lower lip while tugging at his collar. “*Anything*?” he repeated

“Anything,” she repeated.

“Well, why don’t you give me the keys to my room?”

The lady appeared dismayed by this request, despite her assertion that she would do anything for him. Nevertheless, she nodded in an understanding manner, then turned around, and resumed her place behind the desk. As she turned around, she revealed a shapely posterior, leading Naylor to wish that he had considered her proposal more carefully.

He proceeded to take up ink and sign in for this callipygian lady, whom immensely resembled—when squinting hard—the likeness of Florence Crawford, the screen beauty.

He hesitated to say something, then finally said, "Would you care for a cool glass of water before I give you your key? Something to refresh you."

Now this is my second chance, he thought to himself.

"Yes, that would refresh me," he said. "But don't put ice in it."

Oh, how did I screw that up so badly! I'm a fool!

She appeared dismayed, much the same as before, despite the fact that he had accepted her offer. Nevertheless, she once again nodded in an

understanding manner then disappeared somewhere to prepare this cool glass of water without ice.

It took a few minutes longer than it would usually take someone to prepare this glass of water without ice. Naylor thought he had heard her crying and cursing herself at certain intervals. After about four minutes passed, she reappeared with the glass.

"I'm sorry I put ice in it," she confessed. "You said no ice, but I'm such a dolt, I have no talent for even simple tasks of life. If there's *anything* I can do to compensate for my grave error, let me know and it shall be my command."

The professor remained silent. He took the glass and drank it. Several brief but intensely awkward bouts of eye contact interlaid his sips.

She gave the room key to a short Mexican bellhop who insisted on carrying Naylor's luggage, even though he only carried an attaché case containing an extra suit, a toothbrush, and some traveler's books.

The bellhop had given Naylor a wink as he unlocked the door and handed him the key, then waddled off before Naylor could tip him. Naylor had proceeded to take a shower, then had his own way to the memory of his long dead wife. This took up two hours.

Room twelve was unremarkable and moldy. Sparse like a prison cell. Not even a Gideon Bible, but there was bedside radio.

Naylor turned the knob of the bedside radio to the mutual station. The donging chime of a bell rang

in the program, followed by an eerie decrescendo by an oboe.

"Welcome to *Night Creeps*," a solemn voice beckoned, matter-of-factly. "I'm Bill Pratt, master of horror on the screen and the airwaves. The Alpha and Omega of suspense, terror, and extolling the virtues of Goodyear Asbestos—our sponsor."

Naylor grinned at this and pounded his chest like an ape, as he was a loyal customer of Goodyear Asbestos.

"On tonight's c*h-ch-chilling* episode," Pratt's voice continued, "the prevailing theme is that of wrath. You are about to hear a story that wallows in the filthy mire of mankind's darkest, filthiest emotion: the unending quest for a tooth to avenge another tooth. Wrathfulness, that is."

Naylor's eyes widened.

"I will star as Teddy Morgan, a man who waited fifty years locked away from all light and life in a cage before setting out to reap his vengeance on those who earned it. And when the reaping came, he stalked his prey with the malice and forethought of an *ice leopard!* That is why our story tonight is called: 'The Ice Leopard'."

A dissonant fanfare of the oboe sang then faded out into the sound of pouring rain. Pratt narrated:

Our scene is the warden's office at the state penitentiary. A middle-aged man, his shoulders hunched and his hair prematurely gray, stands before the warden's desk, closed in an ill-fitting prison-made suit. His face is yellowed with the powder of long

confinement, but his eyes, shut deeply in dark, shadowed hollows, are bright and clear.

Looking a thim, the warden speaks:

WARDEN: Well, I wish you'd reconsider, Teddy. I don't like to see you walk out here in your condition.

TEDDY: I'll be alright, warden.

WARDEN: Don't be a fool. You've just gotten over a bad case of pneumonia. Why not spend the next week or so in the hospital? Let Doc Reeves put you back on your feet.

TEDDY: My time is up at noon today, isn't it?

WAREN: Yes, but—

TEDDY: That's when I'm leaving—the moment that noon whistle blows.

WARDEN: You're in no shape to travel. Look at'cha, you're still sick, man; deathly sick.

TEDDY: I've been sick for almost fifty years, warden. Ever since those iron gates out there closed behind me. I've waited a lifetime for the cure—planned for it—now I'm going to get it.

WARDEN: Oh, you're just being stubborn, Teddy. I don't understand it. You've been a model prisoner in every way. In the entire history of the penitentiary, only three men had life sentences commuted—and you're one of them. Yet, in a matter concerning your well-being, you act like an obstinate fool. Why?

TEDDY: Because I've got something to do. Something very important.

WARDEN: What's more important than your health?

TEDDY: The thing I've got to do.

WARDEN: Wait a minute, are you going to do something that will land you back in here? Is that it?

TEDDY: Don't worry, warden.

WARDEN: You know, come to think of it, Teddy, there's something I've always wanted to ask you. Something personal.

TEDDY: Go ahead.

WARDEN: In all the years that you've been here, why have you refused to see visitors or mail? Why have you completely cut yourself off from the outside world.

TEDDY: Well, it all boils down to this. A man ages a lot in fifty years. His voice changes, and his way of talking. His features change. He becomes an entirely different person. Especially in a place like this. Just knowing that you're hemmed in by four walls, it does something to you—something, well—that's the answer.

WARDEN: That's no answer at all.

TEDDY: Yes, it is. I didn't want anyone to see me age, to see the changes that were coming over me. The way it is now, the Teddy Morgan who is walking out of here at seventy-eight is nothing like the Teddy Morgan that was brought in at twenty-seven. They're two different people. No one outside this prison will ever recognize me.

WARDEN: Now, is that what you want?

TEDDY: That's exactly what I want.

WARDEN: Why? You've got nothing to be ashamed of. You paid your debt to society.

TEDDY: There's another debt I have to pay. To myself. It's been growing for a long time. A long, long, lonely time.

WARDEN: I don't like the way you're talking, Teddy. What's behind all this?

TEDDY: Fifty years, warden. The best part of my life. A minute ago, you asked me to look at myself. I don't have to look. I can feel it down inside. I'm an old man. An old man at seventy-eight.

WARDEN: Self-pity isn't a bad thing, Teddy.

TEDDY: I'm not pitying myself. I'm thinking about what brought me here. You've got the record right there in front of you. I said I was innocent then, and it still holds. I'm innocent now.

WARDEN: That's a closed book. Why not let it stay closed?

TEDDY: Because there's an unfinished chapter still to be written.

WARDEN: Remember, you haven't stayed your full time. You'll be on probation for five years—and when I say probation, I *do* mean probation.

TEDDY: I'll remember. I've had a long time to think it over.

WARDEN: Incidentally, while we're at it, there's one more thing that's been puzzling me. I mean, befuddling me.

TEDDY: You better hurry. It's almost noon.

WARDEN: Six months ago, when it seemed pretty certain that your commutation was coming through, you made a strange request; you asked to be relieved of the job of running the prison library—a job you've held as far back as I can remember. You asked me to assign you as an apprentice of the prison barber. I granted that request, but I wondered about it at the

time. Would you care to tell me why you suddenly decided to become a barber?

TEDDY: I thought it might be a good idea to learn a trade.

WARDEN: That's not true, Teddy.

[whistle sounds]

TEDDY: There's the noon whistle. That means I'm a free man, doesn't it?

WARDEN: Yes.

TEDDY: Goodbye, warden. Take care of myself.

WARDEN: You haven't answered my question, Teddy.

TEDDY: You mean why did I suddenly decide to become a barber?

WARDEN: Yes.

TEDDY: I told you. I wanted to learn a trade.

WARDEN: And I told you that's not the truth.

TEDDY: You're right, warden. It isn't.

[oboe begins to play, indicating a new scene]

At this point in the broadcast, Naylor felt a strong urge to urinate, due in no small part to the glass of water he had drank earlier. Not one to dawdle, he immediately responded to this urge. The professor upped from his bed to the powder room. Once in the powder room he unzipped his pants, whipped out his outstanding cock, then urinated for fifteen seconds. He then tucked his tool away and zipped up again. He washed his hands with soap first, then dried them second, then flopped back on the bed to resume his listening pleasure.

He had missed about two minutes of the broadcast. It continued:

[door opens]

DALLAS: Well, what'd'cha learn?

WOMAN: It's true, Dallas! They commuted his sentence. He got out yesterday.

DALLAS: Balls! I spend a hundred grand a year on smart word, and where do I get my information? A couple of hopheads and a barber!

DEWEY: But Dallas—

DALLAS: I'm out of my mind, you says. I don't know what I'm talking about. Teddy Morgan's dead. He died in prison ten years ago. I got nothing to worry about. Balls!

HUEY: Well, that's what they told us.

DALLAS: Who told ya?

DEWEY: Our sources of information.

DALLAS: Your sources of information. Balls! Don't make me laugh.

HUEY: Now, look, Dallas—

DALLAS: Get out before I lose my temper. Get out I said!

[door slams]

DALLAS: *[mutters]* Their sources of information. *[shouts]* Woman, get me a drink!

WOMAN: Aw, Dallas, daddy, don't get yourself so upset.

DALLAS: Shut up.

WOMAN: Aw, Dal—

DALLAS: Shut up and stay out of this. None of your business.

WOMAN: Is that a nice way to talk? Who is this Teddy Morgan?

DALLAS: I said it's none of your business.

[door bell rings]

DALLAS: What the duke was that?

WOMAN: Just the door bell. I'll answer it.

DALLAS: Wait a minute.

WOMAN: Now what?

DALLAS: Don't open that door until you find out who it is.

WOMAN: Of all the—

DALLAS: You heard me. Find out who it is, first.

WOMAN: Okay. Who is it? Who is it? No answering.

DALLAS: Balls. It's Morgan trying to trick me.

WOMAN: Dallas, you're white as a sheet.

DALLAS: Take it easy; keep your voice down. Now, listen to me. In case anything happens, he threatened me. I had to protect myself. You understand?

WOMAN: Dallas, what are you doing with that gun?

DALLAS: Never mind. You just follow orders. All right, open the door—slowly.

WOMAN: Dallas, come on—

DALLAS: Open it, I said.

[door opens slowly]

WOMAN: Nobody here.

DALLAS: What's that on the floor?

WOMAN: Rat! A dead rat!

[oboe begins to play, indicating a new scene]

[telephone rotates]

DEWEY: Hullo?

HUEY: Dewey? It's me, Huey. Did you hear about Dallas?

DEWEY: Boy, did I. Somebody left a dead rat outside his door.

HUEY: No, that was yesterday. I mean today.

DEWEY: What about today? Did he get another one?

HUEY: Yeah. It came in a box in the mail.

DEWEY: Holy smokes.

HUEY: He's planning on ducking out of town. He's scared stiff.

DEWEY: Where's he going?

HUEY: Up to his hideout in the mountains.

[oboe begins to play, indicating a new scene]

[sound of engine running; tires screeching]

DALLAS: All right, take the car out to the back, Chewy.

CHEWY: Okey-dokey, boss.

WOMAN: What about the bags, babe?

DALLAS: Chewy will bring 'em.

[footfall sounds as they walk]

WOMAN: How long have you had this place in the mountains, Dallas?

DALLAS: Oh, a couple of years.

WOMAN: Ooh, sure is ghouly-looking.

DALLAS: Well, what did you expect, a summer resort? All I wanted was a place to hole up, lay low while the boys get Morgan. Balls, there should be a bell around here.

WOMAN: Somebody in the house?

DALLAS: Don't you ever get tired of asking questions, woman? I told you on the way up, there's a caretaker. Balls, the bell doesn't work. *[pounds the door]*

WOMAN: If you ask me, this is a whole lot of cra—

DALLAS: Nobody's asking you.

WOMAN: Dallas Macy running away from a stiff mouse.

DALLAS: Pipe down. Somebody's coming.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: Good evening, Mr. Macy.

DALLAS: Oh, good evening. Everything all set?

CARETAKER: Quite, sir. The master bedroom is ready.

DALLAS: Then we'll go right up. This is my woman.

CARETAKER: How do you do?

DALLAS: You're not the same man that was here last year, are you?

CARETAKER: No, sir, that was Rufus, my cousin. He's been ill, and I've been substituting for him. My name is Eddy.

DALLAS: All righty. Bring up a couple of brandies, we'll be upstairs.

[footfall as they climb the stairs]

WOMAN: *[whisper]* I'd hate to be holed up in a place like this for the rest of my life.

DALLAS: Well, just say the word and Chewy will drive you back into town.

WOMAN: Are you kidding?

DALLAS: I'm not in the kidding mood. *[door opens]* Now, see, what's wrong with this room? Four closets. Double exposure.

WOMAN: Very nice. I couldn't ask for anything more.

DALLAS: Close the door.

[door closes]

DALLAS: Now, look, woman. Get one thing straight. I came up here to play safe. That guy's got it out for me, and until he's out of the way, I'm not taking any chances.

WOMAN: I don't get why you're so afraid of this Teddy Morgan guy. What did you do to him? Did you do something bad?

DALLAS: He thinks I set him up, put him behind bars.

WOMAN: Did you?

DALLAS: One of these, woman, you're going to ask the wrong questions.

WOMAN: I know, it's none of my business.

DALLAS: That's your place, now stay there.

WOMAN: Just tell me one thing, Dallas.

DALLAS: What?

[oboe riff]

Pratt's voice chimed in. "You are listening to *Night Creeps* starring me, Bill Pratt. *Night Creeps* as always is sponsored by Goodyear Asbestos—the only

asbestos you need to live a happy and healthy life. I myself use Goodyear Asbestos every day. A study conducted by Stanford University last year concluded that those who do not use Goodyear Asbestos are ten times more likely to be homosexuals. Are you a homosexual?"

Naylor shook his head.

"Good. Now back to our broadcast of 'The Ice Leopard'! Starring me as ex-con Teddy Morgan."

[eerie oboe]

WOMAN: That rat, Dallas. Where did it mean?

DALLAS: What do you think they mean?

WOMAN: I don't know. Got something to do with Teddy Morgan.

DALLAS: Well, you guessed right. Morgan's trying to get me killed. He knows I've got a bad heart. He leaves those things to tell me that I'm a rat. A dead one if he has anything to do with it. But I'm safe up here. The boys will get Morgan.

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yes!

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir, with your brandy.

DALLAS: Ok, come in. Just put that tray down on the table, if you know what I mean.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clanging]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: I guess so.

WOMAN: What about our luggage, Dallas?

DALLAS: Oh, right. Did my man bring the bags up?

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. They're in the hallway, sir.

DALLAS: Well, bring 'em in, will ya?

CARETAKER: Yes, sir.

WOMAN: Soda or water, Dallas?

DALLAS: I'll take it straight

CARETAKER: Where shall I put the bags, sir?

DALLAS: Oh, put them down any place.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clunk]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: Yes. Don't forget to lock up.

CARETAKER: I won't, sir. Good night.

DALLAS: G'night.

WOMAN: G'night.

[door closes]

DALLAS: Oh, that yes-sir-no-sir routine is going to drive me nuts.

WOMAN: He talks like one of those fancy movie butlers.

DALLAS: Looks like a zombie.

WOMAN: I better get the bags unpacked. All the stuff will be wrinkled.

DALLAS: I needed this drink. Maybe I can relax.

WOMAN: Sit down and take it easy.

DALLAS: You know, maybe it won't be so bad staying up here for a week or two.

WOMAN: Hey, how to open this bag, Dallas?

DALLAS: Which one?

WOMAN: Yours. The black leather.

DALLAS: There's a little gadget on the locks. Just press it and it snaps open. Ya got it?

WOMAN: Uh-huh.

DALLAS: We're going to get some good rest and re—

WOMAN: Woah!

DALLAS: What's the matter?

WOMAN: Look! A rat! Another dead rat!

[oboe carries scene out]

DALLAS: Talk, Chewey! Talk you double-dealing dog or I'll cut your skull open!

CHEWEY: I didn't do it! Honest!

DALLAS: I know you're kind. I know it from way back. Teddy Morgan set you up to this.

CHEWEY: No!

DALLAS: Talk!

CHEWEY: I didn't put that dead rat in your bag!

WOMAN: Dallas…

DALLAS: I don't trust you—or you! I don't trust anybody. You're all a bunch of blood-sucking double-crossers. You'd like to see me dead, wouldn't you? Get out of here! Both of you!

[door slams]

DALLAS: And stay out!

[oboe again]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir, with your brandy.

DALLAS: Bring it in.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: This is the second to last bottle, sir.

DALLAS: Put it down.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clinking]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: Yeah, that's all.

[oboe carries scene out]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir, with your brandy.

DALLAS: Bring it in.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: This is the last bottle, sir.

DALLAS: Put it down.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clinking]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: Yeah, that's all.

[oboe carries scene out]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir.

DALLAS: Come in.

CARETAKER: I thought you'd like something to eat, sir. It's been three days since you've had any solid food

DALLAS: Yeah, three days.

CARETAKER: I brought an omelet and some toast.

DALLAS: Thanks.

CARETAKER: Quite all right, sir.

DALLAS: You've been pretty nice to me, Eddy.

CARETAKER: Thank you, sir.

DALLAS: Yeah, pretty nice. I never forget a guy who has been nice to me, and I don't forget him if he stabs me in the back.

CARETAKER: Neither do I, sir.

[oboe carries scene out]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir.

DALLAS: Come in.

CARETAKER: I'm sorry to disturb you, sir.

DALLAS: What have you got there, Eddy?

CARETAKER: I thought that now you're feeling a little better, sir, that perhaps you'd like to be shaved. In almost a week, you haven't.

DALLAS: Don't tell me you're a barber, too.

CARETAKER: I have been a barber, sir.

DALLAS: Well, I could use a shave.

CARETAKER: If I may say so, sir, I think you'll find it very refreshing.

DALLAS: All right, go ahead. Where do you want it?

CARETAKER: The chair you're sitting in will be all right, sir. I'll get some warm water in the bathroom.

[water running]

DALLAS: You know what? I've been thinking. When I go back into town, I'm going to take you with me. Yeah, I could use a man like you.

CARETAKER: That's very kind of you, sir.

DALLAS: I like people like you around me. People who don't ask questions and get in your hair. Take

care of what you're supposed to and that's the end of it. You're a mensch, Eddy.

CARETAKER: I try to keep my place, sir.

[water stops running]

DALLAS: You've got the right idea. Now, what do I do? Lean back?

CARETAKER: In just a moment, sir. I'll have to fasten this strap to the back of the chair. I want the razor to be extra sharp.

DALLAS: You need it sharp for this beard.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir.

DALLAS: You must have been wondering about me these past few days, Eddy.

CARETAKER: No, sir. Not particularly.

DALLAS: You mean you wouldn't like to know why I've been hiding out here in the mountains?

CARETAKER: I'm sure you must have a good reason, sir.

DALLAS: Yes, you can say that again. Someone's gunning for me.

CARETAKER: Gunning for you?

DALLAS: Uh-huh. Somebody trying to get me. Guy named Morgan. Teddy Morgan.

CARETAKER: The name sounds familiar.

DALLAS: He got a life sentence for murder. About fifty years ago. Yes, quite a story on it in the papers. He killed a girl.

CARETAKER: Did he?

DALLAS: That's what the jury thought. They gave first degree with a recommendation for mercy. That saved him from the chair.

CARETAKER: What did you think?

DALLAS: What did I think about what?

CARETAKER: Lean back, sir. I'm almost ready for you.

DALLAS: Hey, isn't that razor sharp enough yet?

CARETAKER: Not quite. I haven't used it in some time. What did you think about Teddy Morgan's conviction?

DALLAS: What's the difference what I thought? The jury cooked his goose.

CARETAKER: Did they?

DALLAS: Yeah. Come on, Eddy. If you're going to shave, you better get to it.

CARETAKER: I'm ready now. Lean back, sir. I'll soak you up.

DALLAS: Okay.

CARETAKER: I assume this Teddy Morgan is out of prison now.

DALLAS: Yeah, got a commutation. Hey, you sure you don't need a lawn mower to get this beard off?

CARETAKER: I can do very well with a razor, sir.

DALLAS: You know, I'm going to feel like a new man when I get through.

CARETAKER: Yes, a completely new man.

DALLAS: Ah, you're a funny guy, Eddy. You talk like a college professor.

CARETAKER: I've had a lot of time to read and study in the past fifty years. A lot of time.

DALLAS: Yeah?

CARETAKER: That's enough soak. Now, just relax, sir. *[etching]* Does the razor prune?

DALLAS: Nope, feels all right.

CARETAKER: That's fine. Nothing like a good sharp razor.

DALLAS: Yeah.

CARETAKER: Now, don't move. It's rather difficult shaving you in this chair. If you move I may cut your throat.

DALLAS: That's not funny.

CARETAKER: It wasn't meant to be funny, Dallas.

DALLAS: What did you say?

CARETAKER: Sit back, Dallas. One slip and you're finished. You're a dead rat.

DALLAS: Teddy Morgan.

CARETAKER: That's right. It's been a long time, hasn't it, Dallas?

DALLAS: Teddy, Teddy, you wouldn't kill me in cold blood, would you?

CARETAKER: This isn't cold blood, Dallas. This hot blood, heated for fifty years. That's how long I've waited. Feel how sharp the razor is.

DALLAS: No, no, Teddy.

CARETAKER: Be careful. It doesn't take much to slit a throat from ear to ear. You know that.

DALLAS: Teddy, I'll give you anything you want. Name your price.

CARETAKER: You couldn't meet it. Only one thing can pay for those torrid years.

DALLAS: Teddy, I've got a bad heart, you know.

CARETAKER: Yes, so I've heard.

DALLAS: All I'm asking for is a break.

CARETAKER: Did you give me a break when you framed me and set me up for life?

DALLAS: I figured you'd beat the rap. I never thought they'd convict you.

CARETAKER: Then you admit framing me.

DALLAS: Yeah, yeah, but I never figured—

CARETAKER: You admit killing the MacGuire girl because she knew too much, because you wanted her out of the way.

DALLAS: Yeah, but I—

CARETAKER: But nothing. Now, feel the razor on your throat. *[Dallas panting]* Touching, deeper…

DALLAS: No, Teddy!

CARETAKER: Deeper…

[Dallas cries out]

CARETAKER: You said you'd be a new man when this was over, but you're wrong, Dallas. You're only a dead rat.

[knock at door]

CARETAKER: Who is it?

WOMAN: It's me. I've come back.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: Come in, woman.

WOMAN: Oh, hello, Eddy. Is Dallas in here? Oh, there he is. He's shaving. Dallas, darling. I couldn't stay away from you. I couldn't—oh, what's the matter with you? You asleep or something?

CARETAKER: I'm afraid not, woman.

WOMAN: Why are his eyes staring that way? Why doesn't he move?

CARETAKER: Be careful. He's dead.

[woman gasps]

WOMAN: Dead! Oh no…

CARETAKER: Yes, he's dead, and my name isn't Eddy, woman. My name is Teddy Morgan.

WOMAN: Teddy Morgan. That Teddy Morgan.

CARETAKER: Yes.

WOMAN: You killed him.

CARETAKER: No, woman, I didn't. You don't see any blood do you.

WOMAN: *[sobbing]* But he's dead.

CARETAKER: I'm afraid I played rather a gruesome joke on him. You see, I was shaving him a very sharp razor. After I told him who I was, I held back the blade—the dull side—against his throat. As you know, he had a bad heart. Unfortunately, he couldn't stand the strain.

WOMAN: You murdered him. You'll go to jail for this.

CARETAKER: Wrong, woman. Quite wrong. Dallas Macy died of a heart attack. That's what a medical autopsy will show.

WOMAN: You caused it. You brought it on.

CARETAKER: That will be very difficult to prove. I've figured this out so carefully, woman. I've paid with fifty years of my life for a murder I did not commit—and now there's nothing the law can do to me for one that I did commit.

[oboe closes scene]

Pratt's closing narration: "*Night Creeps* has brought you 'The Ice Leopard' starring myself. Tune in on the station on this station at this time for our *ch-ch-chilling* story, 'The Witch Doctor's Daughter'. I'll

star as Sheldon Bloom, an African explorer who is cursed to battle the warriors of the dead!"

Naylor turned off the radio, then laid stiff on his bed. He was totally spooked by the twist where Teddy and Eddy were revealed to be the same man. It was almost as good as last week's episode, "The Devil Hat", where a haberdasher was commissioned to make a hat for the devil (scarier than it sounds). He would surely be tuning in next week for 'The Witch Doctor's Daughter'.

But that would be next week. He looked at his watch. It read two thirty, so it was really six thirty. He had an hour or so to kill before meeting Casey, so he decided to grab dinner. The inn had a kitchen, so there must be food. But it would be awkward to face

the innkeeper again. But it would be even more awkward if he met Casey with an empty stomach.

He got out of bed and moseyed to the front desk, but the innkeeper was not there.

He rang the lobby bell.

No answer.

Well if I can't get dinner, he decided, *then I'll go to the library*. So, he jumped in his old jalopy and drove to the library, which was right next to the police station.

On his way to the library he decided to listen to his newly installed car radio. It was just in time for *The Hummer* on the California Network.

The humming theme opened the program. It was eerie just like the *Night Creeps* oboe theme. Then, the host began to speak.

The Hummer: What goes on, radio listeners? I am The Hummer, supreme connoisseur of strange tales. Tonight's story is one I like to call "Murder Mountain Incident.

Moving down the icy slopes of Murder Mountain, the young couple on skis could scarcely be aware of the fact that their downhill progress was being observed by through the telescopic sights of high-powered rifle from the ridge above, and then as they pulled up to a stop behind a protective of tall fir trees, Calvin Cooper caught his attractive partner in his eye.

[Calvin and Ginger laugh]

Calvin: Oh, you had fun darling?

Ginger: Of course, I've had a wonderful afternoon, Calvin.

Calvin: So have I. Come here.

Ginger: Oh God, it's cold out here.

Calvin: Will I see you tomorrow then?

Ginger: Maybe. I-I better go now.

Calvin: Aw, so soon?

Ginger: I must, darling. It'll be dark before long.

Calvin: All right, I'll wait here if you reach the lodge before starting down.

Ginger: Tomorrow? All right. *[shudders]*

The Hummer: A lovely, exciting girl, isn't she, Calvin? Ginger Whiteside, the woman you've chosen to be the next Mrs. Cooper. You stand there, puffing slowly on a cigarette, and watch as Ginger races down the slope, then she's gone from sight. You wait another few minutes until you're certain she's reached the bottom of the slide, and then step out from behind the tree... and as you do... *[gunfire]* The bullet ricochets off the

tree above you and then another. You leap forward, hurl yourself down the slope, racing faster and faster over a stiff white, swerving, twisting crazily. Around you, one bullet after another kicks up a tiny crowd of snow.

SCENE 2

Bartender: Hello, Mr. Cooper, what'll it be?

Calvin: Uh, a scotch as usual. Uh, a double.

Bartender: Right! Oh, uh, by the way—

Calvin: Yeah?

Bartender: Your wife was in looking for you.

Calvin: Oh?

Bartender: She was here a couple of minutes ago. I think she went to make a phone call.

Calvin: Thanks, thank you, sir. Uh, hurry it up with that drink, will you?

Bartender: Sure thing. Uh, How was skiin' today, Mr. Cooper? *[silence]* Mr. Cooper?

Calvin: Uh, uh, what?

Bartender: How was skiin'?

Calvin: Oh, it was, uh, all right.

Bartender: You know, I just don't see what kinda kicks you fellas get outta slidin' down them hills like that. *[glass touches on bar top]* There you are, Mr. Cooper.

Calvin: Uh, thanks.

Kismine: Calvin, Calvin darling.

Calvin: Oh, Kismine.

Kismine: I'll have one of those, too, Joseph.

Joseph: Okay, Mrs. Cooper.

Kismine: Calvin, I just called the Fraziers, they can come.

Calvin: Oh, uh, really?

Kismine: And the Morgans, too, they weren't doing a thing.

Calvin: And, apparently, we are.

Kismine: Of course, darling, I'm giving a little dinner party at the lodge, Fri—Oh, *[*chuckles*]* I didn't tell you!

Calvin: No, no you didn't.

Kismine: But guess who dropped on us. Going to stay for the entire weekend.

Calvin: Your brother Gary.

Kismine: Oh, that's right! How'd you guess?

Calvin: Ah, just a hunch, Kismine. Yeah, I had a feeling today that my dear brother-in-law was around. Close by.

The Hummer: Yes, Calvin, from the moment that first bullet whistled over your head on the ski slope this afternoon, you knew that Gary was in the vicinity, didn't you? That he was the one that tried to kill you. His second attempt in many months, Calvin, each of them unsuccessful. But you know you've got to do something about it, before your luck changes...

SCENE 3

The Hummer: That evening at the dinner party for your wife's friends, Gary is his usual charming self. Dominating the gay lighthearted conversation. Finally, the two of you meet alone on the terrace overlooking the valley.

Gary: Surprised to see me, Calvin?

Calvin: Oh, Gary, can't say that I am. I rather expected you to show up now.

Gary: Hope you don't mind.

Calvin: Should I?

Gary: Well, after all, to have one's brother-in-law barging in this way. It seems I've been popping in on you et cetera quite frequently, you think?

Calvin: Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah. Cigarette?

Gary: Ah, thanks. *[takes a puff]* The truth of the matter is, Calvin, I, um... I worry a lot—about Kismine, I mean.

Calvin: Why should you?

Gary: Oh, things are always happening to Kismine. Accidents of sorts, like last week... a car crash.

Calvin: Well, you can hardly blame her for that. Something went wrong with the steering gear.

Gary: I know... but there have been other things. For example, the time the sun lamp fell into that tub of water. Could've been electrocuted.

Calvin: Oh yes.

Gary: I just can't bear the thought of anything happening to Kismine.

Calvin: Oh, I-I quite understand it. As you said Gary, you're very fond of her, and of course Kismine is, uh, very wealthy. We're both well aware of that fact, aren't we?

Gary: Her first husband was a fine fellow. Awful nice of him to leave her all that money, too, wasn't it?

Calvin: *[snickers]* Quite a break for you, huh?

Gary: Oh, can I help it that Kismine's a very generous woman? After all, I am her brother.

Calvin: All of which entitles you to a very substantial allowance every month.

Gary: Oh, you've tried time and time again to talk her out of it, too, haven't ya?

Calvin: Don't be ridiculous.

Gary: Oh, but you have; the more she spends on brother Gary, the less remains in for, uh, "kitty", so to speak.

Calvin: Don't be absurd.

Gary: Oh, I know you married Kismine for her money, nothing else more. You just can't stand to see anything being, uh, squandered by brother Gary.

Calvin: Now, look, Gary—

Gary: I suppose you're going to tell me you’re madly in love with Kismine.

Calvin: Why should I tell you anything?

Gary: You don't have to. You're in love with Ginger Whiteside. *[long pause]* Yeah, I know all about Ginger. Now, don't bother to deny it old man, I'm well aware of what's been going on between you and that little redhead. I have been for some time.

Calvin: Then why haven't you told Kismine?

Gary: Oh, now, now, now, Calvin, I'm not a complete fool. Kismine's fond of me, sure, but she happens to be head over heels in love with you, and if I dared suggest that you were *[pause]* two timing her, well, she'd probably check me out on my ear, and there would go my lovely little allowance.

Calvin: Suppose I tried to tell Kismine that you tried to kill me on two different occasions.

Gary: I? Try to kill you? Oh, that's crazy.

Calvin: Oh, no. No, it's not. First time was—

Gary: You can prove I tried to kill you?

Calvin: No, no, but I know you did. Suppose I told Kismine that, Gary.

Gary: Aw, she wouldn't believe it.

Calvin: *[scoffs]* Now dear, sweet brother Gary.

Gary: Oh, no, no. As a matter of fact, she might become quite angry with you, old man.

Calvin: I think I will tell her.

Gary: I know you won't. No, Calvin, I'm afraid we're gonna have to leave Kismine out of it. Settle things between the two of us.

Calvin: All right, Gary, we'll do as you say. Settle things just between the two of us.

SCENE 4

The Hummer: It's out in the open now, isn't it, Calvin? The duel between you and Kismine's brother

Gary. The duel you're sure can only end in death for one of you. Gary's well aware of what you've been up to. Yes, he's certain you've tried to kill Kismine, inherit her money, and marry Ginger Whiteside—and you know he's going to try to prevent that, because as long as his sister remains alive, he can count on a very handsome allowance from her each month. Either you or Gary, isn't it, Calvin? But just how you're going to rid yourself of Gary isn't quite clear to me yet. But late the following afternoon, as you're sitting alone at the lodge, before the huge fireplace, sipping a drink. Your wife, Kismine, comes in.

Calvin: Who was that you were talking to outside, Kismine?

Kismine: Mr. Fontana, you know he's one of the ranchers in the valley, also a deputy sheriff.

Calvin: Oh, is that so? Well, what did he want?

Kismine: Nothing in particular. He and his men were just passing by; they've been trying to track down some mountain lions, had an awful lot with them lately—attacking the flocks and so on.

Calvin: Oh, oh I see.

Kismine: And you know, Calvin—oh, uh, seems I forgot—

Calvin: Okay, I—

Kismine: Um, I've had the most wonderful idea! Uh, we could organize a hunt; we get all our friends here together and hunt mountain lions. We could all meet here over the morning, and have a big breakfast, and then join Mr. Fontana and the other rangers.

Calvin: Say, that's not a bad idea.

Kismine: Even stay overnight if we wish.

Calvin: Yeah.

Kismine: He tells me there's some old abandoned cabins up on one of the ridges. They're using 'em as headquarters.

Calvin: What do you—do you suppose the Fraziers would come along?

Kismine: Oh, I know they would.

Calvin: Yeah.

Kismine: Then wait...

Calvin: The other members.

Kismine: ...Marge and Jim Morton, too.

Calvin: So, wait a minute, how about your brother? What about Gary? You suppose he'd like to join the hunt?

Kismine: Of course, he'd love it. How nice of you to think of him, Calvin.

Calvin: Aw, *[chuckles]* not at all, dear. I-I think we should start getting things organized right away.

SCENE 5

The Hummer: It's perfect, isn't it, Calvin? If only Gary, Kismine's brother, will agree to go along. And you're very pleased when you learn that he has agreed—at Kismine's insistence. As the plans for the hunting begin to take place, you find time to steal a few moments with Ginger Whiteside. It's a guarded conversation in the main lodge, as you sit down near her, pretending to be reading a magazine.

Ginger: *[whispering]* You shouldn't be cocky here, Calvin.

Calvin: *[whispering]* Never mind them, just pick up that paper. They won't even notice us. *[pause; normal voice]* Ginger, I can't meet you tomorrow. I'm going to

leave the lodge for a day or so; I'm going along on this hunt they're organizing.

Ginger: Doesn't matter, Calvin.

Calvin: What?

Ginger: I said it doesn't matter. I've been thinking this over. You and me. It isn't going to work.

Calvin: *[whisper]* What are you talking about?

Ginger: *[whisper]* I'm not through yet. You see, moments together like this, it isn't fair to any of us: me, you—your wife.

Calvin: *[whisper]* How about to me for a—*[normal voice]* no, wait, someone's looking this way—*[back to whisper]* now listen—

Ginger: Calvin, you listen. I'm leaving the lodge in the morning. I'm going back south.

Calvin: *[whisper]* Ginger, please—

Ginger: Calvin, it's perfectly obvious, well, that you're not going to be able to do anything about it. I'm sorry.

Calvin: *[whisper]* Ginger, that isn't true.

Ginger: Oh?

Calvin: *[whisper]* Ginger, sweet, just give it a little time.

Ginger: Calvin! I—

Calvin: *[whisper]* Don't—don't ask me to explain anything. It's just that I *[pause]*, well, I—I'm quite sure that things are going to be different. Soon, Ginger, very soon.

SCENE 6

The Hummer: Yes, Calvin, you do feel certain that the time has come—and Ginger's attitude convinces you of another thing; the schedule for disposing of your wife, Kismine, must be moved up, too. That night, the

plan begins to take shape in your mind. It's pretty well in focus, isn't it? As you join the others at breakfast, early in the morning, and prepare to set forth on the pack trip up into the lonely reaches of the mountain. You have a heavy hunting rifle with an easy reach on one of the packed mules—Gary has one, too—but no one in the gay, lighthearted party realizes what each of you have in mind. Gary makes it clear to you at one of the stops along the winding, arduous trail. He waits until you're alone and slips up beside you...

Gary: Quite a setting for the last act, eh, Calvin?

Calvin: What are you talking about?

Gary: *[chuckles]* Oh, stop it, old man. You think I haven't noticed the way you keep eyeing that hunting rifle. Just itching to grab, huh? Blast my head off?

Calvin: You out of your mind? I'm not that much of a fool—with all these people along?

Gary: Oh, there'll be a later time. After all, when we split for the hunt, maybe tomorrow, huh? That might be ideal.

Calvin: Look, look, this Fontana, he's a deputy sheriff, you know.

Gary: That's a good witness to the, er, little accident. Nothing like having the law on your side.

Calvin: I tell you, you better not try anything.

Gary: Is this a truce offering? Or Just something to throw me off my guard, hm? *[beat]* Aw, all right, Calvin, I'll believe ya—for the next twelve hours, anyway, huh? 'Cause you really wouldn't try anything in a big group like this, huh? Ah, but tomorrow—

Calvin: Much as I'd relish it, Gary, I have no such plans for you.

Gary: *[laughs]* Right now, I must see to the needs of our mutual benefactor, my dear sister Kismine. Ta-ta, old man.

Fontana: All right, folks, we'll have to hit the trail again.

[clamor among the pack]

SCENE 7

The Hummer: It's frightening, isn't it Calvin? Gary's cold, self-assured approach... and the terrible realization that he's a much better marksman than you—but you have a plan. Hours later, the pack train finally arrives at the lonely ridge and a tiny group of cabins. You feel quite certain that everything is perfect for your plan. There's just one thing to do,

isn't there? One idea to be plead and make your story airtight later on. You attend to it as the group breaks up to take over the cabins for the night...

Calvin: Oh, Jim! Hey Jim, Jim Morton!

Jim: Huh?

Calvin: Jim, come here a minute.

Jim: Oh yes, Calvin, uh, what is it?

Calvin: Oh, I just wanted to ask a little favor of you. Um, would you and Marge take the cabin next to ours?

Jim: Well, sure. I don't see what difference it makes; they all look pretty much rundown.

Calvin: No, well, no, it isn't that, Jim. It's, uh well, frankly, I don't want Kismine's brother Gary so close to us.

Jim: Oh.

Calvin: Look, well, I-I know how it must sound, but I hope you won't say anything.

Jim: Of course not, but—

Calvin: Gary and Kismine had a big blowout back at the lodge yesterday. I think it was about money.

Jim: Look, you don't have to tell me.

Calvin: Thanks, I know that, you're a good friend, Jim, to Kismine and me... Well, actually, I may just be imagining things, but this Gary is a strange chap, and I'm afraid for Kismine—i-it's better to play it safe.

Jim: No, I understand, Calvin, we'll be right there. Huh, in fact, it looks as if he's taken the cabin that's farthest away.

Calvin: Huh? Oh, well uh, good. Well, it, like I said, may be nothing too urgent. Just forget about it, will ya Jim? That I, uh, ever said anything.

Jim: Sure thing. You know, I better give Marge a hand with the sleeping bags.

Calvin: Yeah, go on, I'll do the same thing. Uh, thanks, Jim, thanks a lot.

The Hummer: Just words, Calvin. Something that Jim will forget for the moment, but something he's sure to remember when you need him most—when the rest of your plan is carried out. The next step is a simple one, isn't it, Calvin? The window inside the cabin you share with Kismine, she pays no attention as you check it casually to see if it can be raised; it can! That's all for now, isn't it, Calvin? But hours later at dinner with the others, around the big campfire, you're very attendant to Kismine, and notice with pleasure that Jim Morton keeps watching her brother Gary. It's all going together perfectly, isn't it, Calvin?

An hour or so later, Mr. Fontana suggests that everyone turn in, get a good night's rest; they all agree. Later in the cabin, you pace the floor as Kismine stirs restlessly in bed...

SCENE 8

Kismine: Calvin, why are you pacing? Aren't you going to sleep?

Calvin: Uh, no, no, not right away, Kismine.

Kismine: Are all the others turned in.

Calvin: Yeah.

Kismine: Bonfire was fun, wasn't it?

Calvin: Yeah, it was all right.

Kismine: Calvin, is something bothering you? You've been very quiet ever since we left the lodge.

Calvin: No, i-i-it's nothing, um, I'm going outside, Kismine, have another cigarette before I turn in.

Kismine: Well, don't wander far. Mr. Fontana said the cliff to the back of our cabin is quite dangerous.

Calvin: Yeah, I-I know all about big cliffs, Kismine. Drop of several hundred feet. Well, I'm not thinking of jumping off, *[pause]* yet.

Kismine: Calvin, please, that isn't funny. You're not—you're not really happy with me, are you?

Calvin: Let's not discuss it at this hour, Kismine. I'm—

Kismine: I know, tired. Tired of me, of everything. Something else my money couldn't really buy. All right, Calvin, this time when we go back North we'll call it quits.

Calvin: No, no, wait a minute, Kismine...

Kismine: Good night, Calvin. Like you are, I'm too tired to discuss it.

Calvin: Aw, but San—*[pause]* all right, go on to sleep. I'll be back soon.

SCENE 9

The Hummer: If you needed any further urging, Kismine has provided it, hasn't she, Calvin? Suggesting that the two of you could call it quits, as she puts it. But that wouldn't be enough, would it? Ginger is expensive. Kismine's money is very necessary. Yes, and everything is clear and simple now, as you walk quietly to the far end of quiet cabins, knock softly on the door of the last. *[soft knock]*

Gary: Who is it?

Calvin: It's me, Gary. Calvin. Open up.

Gary: What do you want?

Calvin: It isn't what I want. Kismine, she wants to talk to you.

Gary: Now?

Calvin: Uh huh, now. *[door opens]* Well now, just don't worry—I'm not armed. This still isn't the time or the place.

Gary: Why does—Why does she want to see me? W-what have you told her?

Calvin: Everything, my dear brother-in-law.

Gary: You're a fool, Calvin!

Calvin: Perhaps, perhaps not. Well, you shouldn't keep Kismine waiting; she's quite annoyed with you.

Gary: Huh? Well, wait till I get a coat.

Calvin: Have your rifle, Gary, you better bring it along in case you have any doubts, uh, about me.

Gary: That's not a bad idea.

Calvin: *[laughs]* I thought you'd agree.

SCENE 10

Gary: I don't see any light in the cabin. Are you sure Kismine—

Calvin: Look closer, Gary. There's a light.

The Hummer: He turns, peers through the darkness toward the cabin, and in that moment your hand closes around a heavy rock in your overcoat pocket. You lift the rock high.

Calvin: Sorry, Gary, *[clunk, heavily exhales]* this is as far as you go.

The Hummer: Quickly, you lift Gary's limp form, carry him to the edge of the cliff to the back of the cabin. A little shove and your plan is complete, isn't it, Calvin? But only the first half. Hurry back to the spot where you killed Gary, don a pair of leather gloves, pick up Gary's rifle, and enter your cabin. You freeze for a moment as Kismine stirs uneasily in her sleep.

You undress quickly, slipping into your pajamas and robe, cross the room, stand near the window as you raise Gary's heavy hunting rifle. Then...*[gunshot].* A moment later you're across the cabin and outside. You hurl the rifle out into the snow, and then shout at the top of your lungs:

Calvin: Jim—Jim Morton—Mr. Fontana, help! Help, somebody come quick, help me!

SCENE 11

[commotion]

Calvin: Please, please, can't you do something for her—for Kismine! You gotta—

Fontana: Now, easy son, easy.

Calvin: Yeah, but—

Fontana: It's too late to do anything. Now try to tell us again what happened. Slowly.

Calvin: Gary and Kismine, they had a terrible row yesterday, back at the lodge.

Jim: That's right, Calvin told me about it this afternoon.

Calvin: I had no idea he'd do anything like this, and he—*[exhales]* well, he came down here and he tried to get in. We wouldn't open the door. I thought he'd gone away.

Fontana: But he—he went through the window, you say?

Calvin: Yeah, th-that's right. He raised it and fired point blank at her, and then he ran. I went out after him, caught him for a second, we struggled over the gun, and he let go of it, broke away.

Jim: So, he didn't know where he was running.

Calvin: Oh, I don't know, maybe he didn't care by then. Went right over the cliff.

Fontana: That's a two or three hundred foot fall. Probably just as well, never've got away with it.

Calvin: Poor Kismine. I Should've told you about the quarrel.

Jim: Easy, Calvin, it wasn't your fault.

Fontana: No, I've seen things like this before, Mr. Cooper. Fella gets crazy mad like that, well, maybe he'd even been drinkin', we don't know.

Calvin: Yeah, but if I hadn't let Gary come along. Don't you see that—

Fontana: He'd have found another way, probably. Nothing to blame yourself for, Mr. Cooper. Not much use blaming anybody now.

SCENE 12

The Hummer: Well, Calvin, it's all over, isn't it? And in a way that you're certain leaves you in the clear. It's simple, isn't it? So simple that even the slow-thinking sheriff's deputy, Mr. Fontana, can have no difficulty in adding things up. You're sure he will have to reach the inevitable conclusion that Gary killed his sister out of frustration when she threatened to cut him off without a cent. You stand right outside the cabin now; the stunned, grief-stricken husband dully recounting the story to the little group of Kismine's friends, as inside, Mr. Fontana examines the position of the body, the cabin. Then, finally comes to the open door and calls to you.

Fontana: Uh, Mr. Cooper, would you step in here for a moment?

Calvin: *[sighs]* Yes, yes, of course. *[footsteps on wood]*

Fontana: It's all right, I've covered her.

Calvin: Thanks.

Fontana: Skip it. It's out of respect to her, not you, Cooper.

Calvin: What?

Fontana: It was an interesting yarn you told out there in front of all those people.

Calvin: Yarn? See here, Mr. Fontana—

Fontana: You said, uh, Gary came to the cabin a little while ago. That you wouldn't unlock the door for him. You said he raised the winda. Fired point blank at her. Thoughtful of him to close the winda after he shot her, wasn't it?

Calvin: No, no, I closed the—I thought she might still be alive, and I didn't want to take any chances getting chill—

Fontana: You made up quite a story, Cooper, but that's not gonna help ya. You shot your wife.

Calvin: Hold on, look here, Fontana, I-I won't stand here and be accused by an amateur detective who thinks he doesn't—

Fontana: Save it, Cooper, and listen. You see, these cabins aren't used much. You shoulda thought of that, because this winda hasn't been raised in the last three hours. Maybe you raised it before then to check it, I don't know, but I do know it hasn't the last three hours.

Calvin: It was, I tell you!

Fontana: Come here, Cooper, have a closer look. Come on, here, pull on the bottom of the sash.

Calvin: Spiderweb.

Fontana: Spun by one of the more permanent residents of this old cabin. He's been busy for at least three hours. Takes these spiders up here that long to spin a web.

Calvin: Little spider. Little thing like a spider.

Fontana: A very busy little spider. I'd say the web he spun between the sill and window sash provides enough evidence for even an amateur detective to make an arrest, wouldn't you?

End

In an event of impossible coincidence, the program ended right as Naylor parked at the library. He went inside.

3

In the library, Naylor took a book off the shelf. Hard cover, no art—just the title and author's name. *Lovers and Killers* was the title. The author's name was B. Landrum. He began to read:

LOVERS AND KILLERS

Van Ashley was not on the shore of Avespilha because it is an overlooked tax haven. He was not certain what was in a Tarzan martini, but he knew that he'd let the

vampish young woman at the end of the bar buy him another—and he hoped that she'd make it a double. It seemed to be getting him drunk enough, and he figured if he got drunk enough, then he could solve the problem that brought him to Avespilha.

He had a cut on his thumb from—and he [*the rest of the page was stained with some sort of cider, and therefore unreadable*]

"What's the deal with the lady down there?" Van Ashley hollered. "Tell her I need one more Tarzan to help me think, then I'll make a move on her or whatever she wants."

"She's out of money," the bartender said.

Van Ashley moaned a sigh of defeat. "She's not a prostitute, is she?"

"She's a hustler—just not the kind you're thinking of."

"Now, what the hell does that mean?"

Jane Slade lifted her navy cap from her eyes. It was a souvenir; a token from an admiral who had saved her from drowning in Borneo—it was also a new, fresh thing that kept her from getting bored with herself. She hung one leg out from behind her corner of her end of the bar, then the other leg. She had been flirting with houndstooth shorts, and she was beginning to fall in love with them just for the way that they sharpened her supple hips, just the way her copper bangs lit up her hazel eyes.

One bare leg, the other bare leg, and those crazy hips made their way to Van's end of the bar. She told him: "I got eight balls racked up on the billiard table,

and I bet you six-hundred escudos that you can't best me."

Van knocked his empty glass aside, sneering a righteous sneer as he hugged the bartop for leverage off his stool. "You didn't get me that drunk."

"Eight-hundred?"

"You picked the wrong mark." He stopped and clicked his tongue as if that would keep him from slurring his words. "I happen to be with the law—the international law—sister."

"I like it when you call me sister."

"I have better things to do."

Jane laughed, and her tumbling breasts perked up under her polo. This aroused and angered Van Ashley at once. He was able to limp two steps toward her, not

sure if he was planning to hit her or kiss her, before he hit and kissed the floor.

Jane laughed again. “I’ll tell you what: I’m not wearing any underwear.”

“Are we still talking about billiards?”

“Yes, and I’ve changed my stakes. You ever heard of strip poker?”

The bartender raised a hesitant hand. “Now, wait a minute, Jane.”

“I have my own table, Ant. If the lawman is clean enough for walking distance, I figured we could do it at my bungalow. What do you say, lawman?”

“I can still walk.”

The moon was new, and the stars were so dim that only the lights of torches along the cobble row led the way to Jane’s house along the beach. It was a

temporary home; a globetrotter's shack, two stories high.

"I share it with three men, but they're out doing the same thing you were doing. They'll be out all night and all morning."

The lawman was too intent on keeping his lathered stagger discreet and presentable to hear—though only ladies of the night and a handful of other drunks were around to make out his hunched figure in the darkness.

"I share it with another woman, too, but she's asleep—always asleep. Her name is Ruby. Ruby Stanwyck"

A flock of sandpipers up and revealed the dry beach, still hot in the night.

Jane shoved open the screen door and waved Van in. No locks.

"I never got your name," Van said.

"You must have missed the bartender saying it."

"Well, what is it? My name is Van. Van Ashley."

She turned on the light to the open floor, and moved immediately to the green table by the stairs. "That's a stupid name."

The international lawman's red nose blushed deeper. She didn't look at him, and didn't have to know that he was miffed to the point of sobriety. He wasn't foolish enough to make another move at her.

"If you must know, my name is Jane. Jane Slade."

"Well, that's—" He turned the name over in his trying, deciding whether it was stupider than his. It wasn't. "That name sounds like you made it up."

"You're not just any lawman, you're a detective. My parents called me Mary Laufer, but my admirers call me Jane Slade." She finished racking the balls, and began to chalk her cue.

"Is that you *nom de pool*?" He had his own shallow laugh.

She didn't answer. She offered him a cue. He appraised her figure once more, though it looked more as if he had seen a snooker before and was wondering what it was for. The chances of him finding his way back to his rental (or even back to the bar) were slim, and he knew it. There was not much of his mind to make up, so he took the cue from her.

"You might want to chalk that. I'll break. You know the rules, don't you?"

Jane's [*once again the page was stained with cider, and therefore unreadable*]

"I lied before. I am wearing underwear. Do I look better in houndstooth or plaid?"

Van Ashley seized Jane's hips and thrusted them close to his. "I am going to ravish you, Jane."

"For God's sake, not on the table."

"We'll do it on the beach."

"Let's go upstairs."

She pushed him away. "First door on the right, upstairs. I'll meet you there."

When she met him there, up in her bedroom, she was holding a sliced grapefruit like a Greek bearing gifts. He assured himself: *Maybe grapefruits are aphrodisiacs*.

"Lubricant," she said. "I want to be juiced—covered in it." She breathed a hot breath into his red face. "I want to be real bad, Van Ashley."

He wanted to say *Why are you doing this to me?* When she put the fruit in his hand, and clenched his fingers into the pit, he remembered he wasn't being punished. Or maybe he was in a strange way—like a lotus-eater.

Through all the heat, his voice was calm. "I'm going to cover you in juice," he professed. The room was lightless. He could make nothing of it except the bed was big enough and the sheets were fresh linen. The linen was only getting wet now, as he fumbled about for her pussy.

They had detective sex, exotic island sex, post-billiard sex, tax haven sex, Tarzan sex. They had

oral and vaginal sex, too. Casual, meaningless, protected sex. The sweet whiffs of the sea breeze were all but conquered by the smell of sex. Each grain of sand on the arid shore at the nautical dawn quaked with each eclipse of the wicked flesh and every truculent suck—of wet, dripping sex.

When they awoke they played another round of pool, both undressed.

When they awoke they played another round of pool, both undressed—

Naylor shut the book with a resounding clap. "Boring!" he announced to no one in particular. The librarian shushed him, but he did not care. He placed *Lovers and Killers* back on the shelf and looked for a better novel to occupy his time. This time, he would

choose a paperback. Ah! One caught his eye. *Mistress of the Waterfront* by Mycroft Hegel. The cover depicted a tempting blonde woman clothed only in a sheer white gown as she brisked along the moonlight strand. “This shall be an excellent read!” Naylor announced.

MISTRESS OF THE WATERFRONT

PART ONE: *"The Wave"*

Essie Harley had no raincoat and no umbrella; only a crossword puzzle and a black velvet overcoat, which hung on the rack beside the door of Bud's Tavern in the coastal town of St. Giles at the border of Maine and New Hampshire, on the darkest, stormiest night Bulwer-Lytton ever could have dreamt. There were other people in Bud's Tavern—Norbert Tolliver, his sister Gretchen, old Jed Hand, Wanda, and Bud himself—but they hardly made company, even for themselves. Edgar and Ellen were there, too, but they were up in the dove's nest, where the patron's below could, on occasion, make out a word or two:

"…Edgar, I've got to talk to you…"

"…I thought everything to be said was said last night…"

"…Can't you see what you're doing to me?…"

"…Ellen, whatever's been done, we've done to each other…"

Eventually the throes of passion ensued on cue, and Bud tuned out the noise, leaning over his bartop with a vindictive eye on Essie.

"Hey, how long you gonna stay here—and that drifter? Well, I don't like it," he told her.

"I like it, bud. He lays enough."

"What if Clark catches on? Then there'll be hell to pay."

"Clark's too busy with his checker round robin up at the firehouse to give a damn what Ellen's doin'. Ellen Trask has been comin' here for the last two

years—five nights out of ten—and Clark's never once made an inquiry into her doin'."

"Yeah, but, this is the first time she misbehaved—and makin' a habit of it—and with a stranger, too!"

"Well, he must be doin' somethin' right. Ellen keeps comin' back for more … of whatever he's slippin' into her."

Jed Hand clammored over, knowing of but not caring for the subject of their conversation. "Goddamn 'box," he said, "I put *two* quarters in. Not a goddamn sour note, even."

"Son of a bitch, it was working this afternoon! Guess it's out of order."

"Essie, this ain't the liveliest place. Without music, it's next best to havin' drinks at Spencer's funeral parlor. Whole goddamn place is dyin'."

"Hey, you see that new waitress bitch over at the diner?" Norbert Tolliver grinned in the corner, half-drunk on a pint that was not even a quarter empty, convinced that his twisted pleasantries would rouse the tavern. "Beautiful, huge tits. Incredible, ripe ass just ready for a pluckin'."

"You make me sick," Gretchen told Norbert.

"Yes sir, today I'm goin' to be split right open just askin'."

Gretchen shook her head, and Jed Hand got out of his seat, throwing his arm around her shoulder, "Goddamn jukebox. The place needs some entertainment." He grinned, though not as wide as

Norbert's grin, "Every hear me do the 'Ballad of Melissa Gray'?"

Grethen shrugged his arm off, "Hundreds of times"

"Okay, if you insist." He took a short breath, "The spawn of the sea god—"

"Oh, Christ, spare us," Gretchen finished off her drink with a side eye toward Jed.

He took the side eye back to his stool, and turned to Essie, "Old, fine things aren't appreciated anymore,"—He darted his eyes towards Gretchen until she looked up from her glass—"around here. Pity when you find strangers more ready to listen. City fella, Ryder, over the ocean beach, he sat and listened to me *all afternoon*. Every verse; twice over. He appreciated it, I'll tell you. That city fella hung on

every word. The sea was kickin' up, the clouds were boilin'—gettin' darker every second. Big ol' *coal* raindrops were starin' to fall! Still, he listened." He paused with a film of self-satisfaction over his dead eyes, "Spawn of the sea god, they used to say / Many good people who lived 'round my bay / Tousled of hair, haunted of eye / Wild as the whirlwind—frightened, shy / She came out of nowhere / The tempest, the spray /"

As one speaks of the devil, the wind whisked dutifully, yet all breath left the room as the door opened and a stranger appeared: A green-eyed woman, with red hair drenched by the rain.

Jed lashed his head around, eyes livened by superstition. "Untamed zenith of Melissa Gray," he muttered as breath refilled the room. The patrons

inspected her mournfully, except for Norbert who smirked, and Gretchen who laughed. Essie, Wanda, and even Bud joined, but Jed Hand inspected her mournfully.

"Well, Uncle Jed," Gretchen spoke, "She couldn't have made a better actress with a flourish of trumpets."

The woman moved her hands nervously, not knowing what to do with them.

Essie approached the strange woman, and the strange woman said, "Ma'am, I had to

come in from the stormfront a little while. I saw a light and—"

"Can I get you a drink?"

"I don't have any money."

Bud threw his towel. “Well, shit. Mighta figured that.”

Essie ignored him.“Can I get one of the boys to drive you home?”

The strange woman said nothing.

“Where’s your home?”

“I don’t have a home.”

Gretchen sneered, and leaned on her elbow against the bartop, knowing it was going to be an even longer night than expected. “Bitch, she escaped from the nut house.”

“Why are you here?”

The strange woman’s mouth danced a silent stutter, initiating a pas de deux with her nerved hands still pawing errantly at her green raincoat—a petty

thing; careworn and subdued as the woman's face. "I came to see my mother," she managed.

"Your mother? She lives here in town?"

"That's what they told me."

Gretchen rolled her eyes, "What's your mother's name?"

"I don't know." The woman almost recoiled. "They told me her name was Jane Smith."

This amused Gretchen as much as anything could have at that moment. "Jane Smith? What kind of a name is that?" She looked toward Wanda, fishing for a supplement of incredulity.

"Who told you that?" Wanda asked, though she was more sympathetic than Gretchen.

"The lady at the bus stop."

The crowd just stared at her in silence

"I know… Guess she felt sorry for me." She smiled half-heartedly for a brief second. "I don't want to get in anybody's trouble."

Essie ran a hand along the drench of the woman's coat. She noticed that it was not a raincoat at all, but a plain, cotton trench coat. "Do you have anything else to wear?"

"My bag was stolen at the Hemsmith bus depot."

As the woman spoke, Essie reached for her overcoat and wrapped it around the woman, without taking eyes off her. "Let's get you into a nice, hot bath," she said

The sudden patheticism toward this troubled stranger was at first tolerable to Gretchen, but once it evolved into motherly alms, her sensitive allergy to a mawkish display—or perhaps, her general

misanthropy, it may have been—induced another sneer. “What’s *your* name?” she asked. A fly on the wall could tell that she was hoping for another amusement to stow the now overbored expression off her face.

Yet, the woman must have shared the acute observational skills of a fly on the wall, because she remained silent.

“I didn’t get it. What do they call you?”

The woman’s doelike exterior waned, her eyes flashed, and like the lightning in her eyes, a touch of pride filled her voice, “Misty. My name is Misty Smith.”

Despite Misty’s annoyance, Gretchen was thoroughly amused, “Misty? What kind of a name is that?” She again looked toward Wanda, but this time Wanda said nothing.

Misty smiled nervously once more, and even showed signs of laughter “It’s just a name. Everybody always calls me Misty. It’s ’cuase I’m kinda dumb.”

“Then you must have another name,” Essie said, “what is that other name?”

“Melissa. Melissa Smith. I was born in a foundling home, and my mother left me the day after I was born, and I want to find her.” And just as easily as it had waned, the doelike expression waxed once more.

Noticing this, Essie confined Misty in her arms. “Let’s go take that bath.”

Jed Hand waited until the two women had left for the washroom before he helped himself to another in a series of shots he had been downing that night. Though he had contributed nothing to the exchange surrounding Misty, his thoughts on the matter were

all but apparent to the other patrons and Bud. Likewise, his company could only predict the moment when he would voice those thoughts.

"Yessiree. Spawn of the sea god, they used to say / Many good people who lived 'round my bay / Tousled of hair, haunted of eye / Wild as the whirlwind—frightened, shy / She came out of nowhere / The tempest, the spray / That untamed zenith—"

"Shut up! You rotten old bastard."

Gretchen had leaned across the corner of the bar into Jed's ear, but he made a point not to meet eyes with her. He just stared in the direction of the washroom. "No respect," he said, as Gretchen sat back to nursing her third glass that night. "No respect at all."

After the bath, Essie led Misty up to the dove's nest, where Edgar and Ellen must have come down and left through the back—gone their separate ways.

The room was little but a sturdy roof, wooden floorboards, and a warm though unframed mattress. Sparse essentials, except for the kitsch yellowed wallpaper that flung wildflowers at the women's faces. "It ain't much," Essie said. "You can stay here until the storm mows over."

"It's a whole lot better than where I've been sleeping. I spent the last four nights in a freight shed at the railway station."

"You've been in town for four days?"

"I spent every second looking for the woman who gave birth to me. There's no Jane Smiths anywhere."

"Not if we use the false name. Most gals do, who have babies they didn't…"

"Didn't want." Both women sighed, and Misty, still wrapped in a towel, sat on the mattress. "She must've been awful ashamed of me. I thought about that."

Essie sat beside this lovelorn woman she had befriended on the naked bed.

She had one question on her mind: "Then why seek her out?"

"I have to find out who I am," Misty said to the floorboards. "I really don't know who I am. If I could just see where I came from, then maybe I would know. Through some kind of magic. If I could just once call out 'Mama' and somebody would turn around and smile at me, that would be enough."

Essie said nothing, for she knew not what to say.

" I caused you too much trouble for one night. Thank you."

"You can call me Essie," she said, still not knowing—

Naylor closed the book and tossed it over his shoulder. "All these books are so fucking boring! If only there were more writers like John Steinbeck! When is coming out with his next astounding book?"

The librarian's heels clicked on the floor. Her face was stuck in a permanent scowl. "Sir, I begged and I begged for your silence, but you have disobeyed me one time too many!"

"Forgive me, ma'am but all of these books aren't the bag I'm looking for."

"And just what are you looking for?"

"*Excitement*."

She raised her eyebrows, then rubbed her hand on her chin while looking off to the side. "I may have just the thing for you, but you must promise not to tell a living soul!"

The librarian grabbed Naylor by the arm, lifting him from his seat.

"OUCH! That hurts!"

"Come with me."

She looked around. Nobody was looking. She ushered him off to a bookshelf in the back. There, she ran her finger along the shelf until she came across a

copy of *The Moonstone* by Collins. She tugged at the book, then the shelf revealed a secret passage.

They both entered a dimly lit room, furnished only with a wooden table and a single chair. Atop the table was a book.

"In 1867, before Samuel Clemmens—later known as Mark Twain—achieved worldwide fame with *The Innocents Abroad*, he wrote a vampire story called 'The End of the Evening'. It was a parody of the gothic works of Hawthorne. Nobody would publish it, so he stashed the manuscript away, where it was recovered by his estate in the years after his death. The Twain estate resolved to keep the work under lock and key and deprive the public of this story. Fortunately—through a comedy of errors—I stumbled across a second copy of, unbeknownst to

the estate. I have stored it away here. Only I, and now you, know about it. You mustn't let this information leave this room or the estate would surely eliminate me. Do I have your sworn word?"

"You have my word."

"Good. Would you like to read it?"

"If it's exciting."

"It is."

"Then I will."

He sat down at the table and began to read:

THE END OF THE EVENING

The famous castle of the Lavokis family had long towered over the hillside of the Bavarian valley. Count Lavokis, the last surviving member of the historic clan, was tall, handsome, kind. Indeed, the

only wonder in the village was: when will he marry and raise a son to continue the glory of his ancestors?

And then one storm-tossed night, when he was out on the marshes with his hunting dog, Lavokis saw a tall, beautiful, dark-haired woman in a long, flowing veil walking across the meadows towards him. It seemed her carriage had overturned on the bridge and crashed into the raging waters of the casking river. Her drivers and horses had perished, but she had been able to save herself. The Count had already surrendered to the romance of their meeting, but only the hound-dog seemed to whimper and growl and behave badly whenever the lady drew near him—but the Count insisted that the lady be his guest, and took him to his castle. Within a fortnight, Lavokis had wooed and won her, and the village

celebrated the wonderful news—Lavokis would have an heir!

In the days preceding the marriage, the young Count seemed to be failing in health. He lost weight so that his uniform seemed to hang on him. Curiously enough, to the staff of the castle, Vanessa—their future mistress—fairly glowed in health since her ordeal in the river. When no one could recall seeing her in the daytime, rumors began to spread; the old wives tales of vampires could stalk at night and sleep in the daytime swept through the village like wildfire.

Finally, up in the master bedroom where he lay exhausted, Count Lavokis himself had to credit the movers. How else the sudden loss of weight and failing health? And how could Vanessa's good health coincide with the loss of his own vitality? Count

Lavokis made up his mind; he pulled at the bell cord by his bed and summoned his manservant. When the fellow appeared, the Count asked his fiancée be brought to him, but the servant shook his head.

The Lady Vanessa had gone out before dawn, riding out to the west, as was her usual custom.

Count Lavokis had heard enough. He dressed, armed himself with a short dagger, and ordered his fastest horse. He thundered down the castle road off to the west—towards the very spot where he first met Vanessa.

The meadows were barren, and darkness was coming. The Count bid his horse carefully over the hilly moor. Finally, he found what he was looking for—the stone slab set in the earth, covered over with violets and leaves. Triumphantly, he dragged it to one

side, and looking down, he could just make out an open coffin with Vanessa lying in it. The pale beauty and blood-red lips gleaming in the dying light.

Lavokis drew his dagger and raised it for the kill. It is said that the only way that you can kill a vampire is a stake through the heart while it sleeps.

Suddenly, the dagger fell from his hands; a slow eerie smile played over his face. Like a stone man, he settled down beside her to wait for the vampire's hour—for he had learned Vanessa's secret too late—too late to stop him from becoming a vampire himself.

And, my friends, the lover's hour beheld two bats wheeling through the twilight. †

Naylor looked up from the manuscript.

“What did you think?” the librarian asked.

“I can see why it was rejected for publication,” Naylor retorted.

The librarian began to cry, and Naylor left the library.

4

After leaving the library, Naylor walked next door to the police station. He and Casey jumped into Casey's patrol car and headed toward the Unger farm.

"Can I ask you a personal question, Casey?" the professor inquired, as they drove down a dusty road through a wooded area.

"Sure you can. Shoot."

"What brand of asbestos do you use?"

The sergeant looked puzzled, almost befuddled. “What brand of asbestos?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I use Goodyear. Why do you ask?”

“No reason.”

So it was settled. For a long while there was a thick and saucy silence in the air. Then Casey interjected.

“While we’re on the subject of casual conversation, I'd like to thank you, Naylor.”

“Thank me for what?”

“You mentioned that fellow Steinbeck—the overlooked writer—back at the station when we first met. Well, I took a trip to the public library to check up on him. As I’m sure you know, he has only published one book, so far—*Cup of Gold*. It had not

been checked out, so I took a peek inside, and, golly, professor, it is the best reading I've ever enjoyed in my whole life on this spinning Earth."

Dear readers, I, Peter Pym, happen to be a good friend of Mr. Steinbeck. With his permission, I have included a sneak peek into the first chapter of *Cup of Gold* to aid those unfamiliar with his work. You can read the rest at your local library or bookstore:

All afternoon the wind sifted out of the black Welsh glens, crying notice that Winter was come sliding down over the world from the Pole; and riverward there was the faint moaning of new ice. It was a sad day, a day of gray unrest, of discontent. The gently moving air seemed to be celebrating the loss of some gay thing with a soft, tender elegy. But in the pastures great work

horses nervously stamped their feet, and all through the country small brown birds, in cliques of four or five, flew twittering from tree to tree and back again, seeking and calling in recruits for their southing. A few goats clambered to the tops of high lone rocks and long stared upward with their yellow eyes and sniffed the heavens.

The afternoon passed slowly, procession-like with an end of evening, and on the heels of the evening an excited wind rushed out, rustled in the dry grasses, and fled whimpering across the fields. Night drew down like a black cowl, and Holy Winter sent his nuncio to Wales.

Beside the high-road which lined the valley, ran up through a cleft in the hills, and so out into the world, there stood an ancient farm-house built of heavy stones

and thatched. The Morgan who had built it played against Time and nearly won. Inside the house a fire was burning on the hearth; an iron kettle hung over the blaze, and a black iron oven hid in the coals which fell about the edges of the flame. The brisk firelight glinted on the tips of long-handled pikes in racks upon the walls, weapons unused in the hundred years since Morgan clamored in Glendowers' ranks and trembled with rage at the flinty lines of Iolo Goch.

The wide brass bindings of a great chest, which stood in a corner, sucked in the light and glowed resplendently. Papers there were in the chest, and parchments, and stiff untanned skins, written in English and Latin and the old Cumric tongue: Morgan was born, Morgan was married, Morgan became a knight, Morgan was hanged. Here lay the history of the

house, shameful and glorious. But the family was few now, and little enough likely to add records to the chest other than the simple chronicle: Morgan was born—and died.

There was Old Robert, for instance, sitting in his high-backed chair, sitting and smiling into the fire. His smile was perplexity and a strange, passive defiance. You would have said he sought to make that Fate which was responsible for his being, a little ashamed of itself by smiling at it. Often he wearily considered his existence, ringed around with little defeats which mocked it as street children torment a cripple. It was strange to Old Robert that he, who knew so much more than his neighbors, who had pondered so endlessly, should be not even a good farmer. Sometimes he

imagined he understood too many things ever to do anything well.

And so Old Robert sipped the burned ale of his own experimenting and smiled into the fire. His wife would be whispering excuses for him, he knew, and the laborers in the fields removed their hats to Morgan, not to Robert.

Even his aged mother, Gwenliana, here beside him, shivering to the fire as though the very wind sounds about the house called in the cold to her, was not so judged incompetent. In the cottages there was a little fear of her and a great respect. Any day when she sat in the garden, holding her necromantic court, you might see some tall farm lad blushing and hugging his hat across his chest while he listened to Gwenliana's magic. For many years, now, she had been practicing

the second sight and taking pride in it. And though the family knew her prophecies to be whole guesses whose shrewdness grew less sharp with her years, they listened to her with respect, and simulated awe, and asked of her the location of lost things. When, after one of her mystic recitations, the scissors were not discovered under the second board of the shed floor, they pretended to find them there anyway; for, had she lost the robe of augury, there would have remained only a little wrinkled old woman soon to die.

This play of claque to a simpleton was a harsh tax on the convictions of Mother Morgan. It outraged her nature, for she was one who had, apparently, come into the world to be a scourge to all foolishness. Such matters as had so obviously no connection either with

the church or with the prices of things were plainly nonsense.

Old Robert had loved his wife so well and so long that he could think sharp things about her, and the thoughts could not injure his affection. When she had come home this afternoon, raging over the price of a pair of shoes she hadn't wanted anyway, he had considered: "Her life is like a book crowded with mighty events. Every day she rises to the peak of some tremendous climax which has to do with buttons or a neighbor's wedding. I think that when true tragedy comes in upon her, she will not see it over her range of ant-hills. Perhaps this is luck," he thought, and then—"I wonder, now, how she would compare the king's own death with the loss of one of the sow's red pigs."

Mother Morgan was too busy with the day itself to be bothered with the foolishness of abstractions. Some one in the family had to be practical or the thatch would blow away—and what could you expect of a pack of dreamers like Robert and Gwenliana and her son Henry? She loved her husband with a queer mixture of pity and contempt born of his failings and his goodness. Young Henry, her son, she worshiped, though of course she could not trust him to have the least idea of what was to his benefit or conducive to his health. And all of the family loved Mother Morgan and feared her and got in her way.

She had fed them and trimmed the lamp. Breakfast was on the fire. Now she searched about for something to mend, as though she did not mend everything the moment it was torn. In the midst of her

search for busyness, she paused and glanced sharply at young Henry. It was the kind of harsh, affectionate look which says, "I wonder, now, if he is not in the way of catching cold there on the floor." And Henry squirmed, wondering what things he had neglected to do that afternoon. But immediately she caught up a cloth and went to dusting, and the boy was reassured.

He lay propped on one elbow and stared past the fire into his thoughts. The long gray afternoon, piercing to this mysterious night, had called up strong yearnings in him, the seeds of which were planted months before. It was a desire for a thing he could not name. Perhaps the same force moved him which collected the birds into exploring parties and made the animals nervously sniff up-wind for the scent of winter.

Young Henry was conscious, this night, that he had lived on for fifteen tedious years without accomplishing any single thing of importance. And had his mother known his feeling, she would have said, "He is growing."

And his father would have repeated after her, "Yes, the boy is growing." But neither would have understood what the other meant.

Henry, if you considered his face, drew from his parents almost equally. His cheek bones were high and hard, his chin firm, his upper lip short and thin like his mother's. But there, too, were the sensual underlip, and the fine nose, and the eyes which looked out on dreams; these were Old Robert's features, and his was the thick, wiry hair coiled like black springs against the head. But though there was complete indecision in Robert's face,

there was a great quantity of decision in Henry's if only he could find something about which to decide. Here were three before the fire, Robert and Gwenliana and young Henry, whose eyeslooked out beyond the walls and saw unbodied things—looked into the night for the ghosts.

iding along the road, or come upon the ghost of a Roman legion marching at double quick to reach its sheltering city of Caerleon before the full storm broke. And the little misshapen beings of the hills would be searching out deserted badger holes to cover them from the night. The wind would go crying after them through the fields. In the house it was quiet except for the snapping fire-noises and for the swishing sound of blown thatch. A log cracked on the hearth; and out of the crevice a thin blaze leaped up and curled about the

black kettle like a flower of flame. Now Mother flurried to the fireplace. "Robert, you will never be paying attention to the fire. You should be poking at it now and again." Such was her method. She poked a large fire to make it smaller, and, when it died, she stirred the embers violently to restore the flame. A faint sound of footsteps came along the high-road—a sound that might have been the wind or those walking things which cannot be seen. The steps grew louder, then stopped in front of the door from whence came a timid knocking. "Come!" Robert called. The door opened softly, and there, lighted against the black night, stood a bent, feeble man with eyes like weak flames. He paused on the threshold as though undecided, but in a moment advanced into the room, asking in a strange, creaking voice, "Will you be knowing me, I wonder,

Robert Morgan? Will you be knowing me that have been out so long?" His words were a plea. Robert searched the shrunken face. "Know you?" he said. "I do not think—wait!—can it be Dafydd? our little farm lad Dafydd that went away to sea years past?" A look of complete relief came into the face of the wayfarer. He might have been applying some delicate, fearful test to Robert Morgan. Now he chuckled. "It's Dafydd, sure; and rich—and cold." He finished with a wistfulness like a recurring pain. Dafydd was gray-white and toughened like a dry hide. The skin of his face was stiff and thick so that he seemed to change expression with slow, conscious effort. "I'm cold, Robert," his queer, dry voice went on. "I can't seem ever to get warm again. But anyway I'm rich,"—as though he hoped these two might balance—"rich along with him they call Pierre le

Grand." Young Henry had risen, and now he cried: "Where have you been to, man—where?" "Where? Why, I've been out to the Indies, that's where I've been; to Goaves and to Tortuga—that's the turtle—and to Jamaica and the thick woods of Hispaniola for the hunting of cattle. I've been all there." "You'll be sitting down, Dafydd," Mother Morgan interrupted. She spoke as though he had never been away. "I'll about getting something warm to drink. Will you look how Henry gobbles you with his eyes, Dafydd? Like as not he'll be wanting to go to the Indies, too." To her, the words were a pleasant idiocy. Dafydd kept silence, though he appeared to be straining back at a desire to talk. Mother Morgan frightened him as she had when he was a tow-headed farm boy. Old Robert knew his embarrassment, and Mother, too, seemed to sense it,

for when she had put a steaming cup in his hands she left the room. Wrinkled old Gwenliana was in her seat before the fire, her mind lost in the swimming future. Her clouded eyes were veiled with to-morrow. Behind their vague blue surfaces seemed to crowd the mounting events and circumstances of the world. She was gone out of the room—gone into pure Time, and that the future. Old Robert watched the door close behind his wife, then settled himself with turnings as a dog settles. "Now, Dafydd," he said, and peered smiling into the fire, while Henry, kneeling on the floor, gazed with awe at this mortal who held the very distances in his palm. "Well, Robert—it's about the green jungle I wanted to tell and the brown Indians that live in it, and about him they call Pierre le Grand. But, Robert, there's something gone out of me like a little winking light. I

used to lie on the decks of ships at night and think and think how I'd talk and boast when only I came home again—but it's more like a child, I am, come home to cry. Can you understand that, Robert? Can you understand that at all?" He was leaning forward eagerly. "I'll tell you. We took the tall plate ship they call a galleon, and we with only pistols and the long knives they have for cutting trails in the jungle. Twenty-four of us there was—only twenty-four and ragged—but, Robert, we did horrid things with those same long knives. It's no good for a man that was a farm lad to be doing such things and then thinking about them. There was a fine captain— and we hung him up by his thumbs before we killed him. I don't know why we did it; I helped and I don't know why. Some said he was a damned Papist; but then, so was Pierre le

Grand, I think. "Some we pushed into the sea with their breast plates shining and shimmering as they went down—grand Spanish soldiers and bubbles coming out of their mouths. You can see deep into the water there." Dafydd ceased and looked at the floor. "You see, I don't want to be hurting you with these things, Robert, but it's like something alive hidden in my chest under my ribs, and it's biting and scratching to get out of me. I'm rich of the venturing sure, but most times that doesn't seem enough; I'm richer, maybe, than your own brother, Sir Edward." Robert was smiling with tightened lips. Now and then his eyes wandered to the boy where he knelt on the hearth. Henry was taut with attention, gluttonously feeding on the words. When Robert spoke, he avoided Dafydd's eyes. "Your soul's burdening you," he said. "You'd best have a talk with

the Curate the morning—but about what I don't know." "No, no; it's not my soul at all," Dafydd went on quickly. "That soul leaks out of a man the very first thing in the Indies, and leaves him with a dry, shrunken feeling where it was. It's not my soul at all; it's the poison that's in me, in my blood and in my brain. Robert, it's shriveling me up like an old orange. The crawling things there, and the little flying beasts that come to your fire of nights, and the great pale flowers, all poisonous. They do horrible things to a man. My blood is like cold needles sliding in my veins the moment, and the fine fire before me. All this—all—is because of the dank breathing of the jungle. You cannot sleep in it nor lie in it, nor live in it at all but it breathes on you and withers you. "And the brown Indians—why, look!" He rolled back his sleeve, and Robert in disgust motioned

him to cover the sick white horror which festered on his arm. "It was only a little scratch of an arrow—you could hardly see it; but it'll be killing me before years, I guess. There's other things in me, Robert. Even the humans are poisonous, and a song the sailors sing about that." Now young Henry started up excitedly. "But the Indians," he cried; "those Indians and their arrows. Tell me about them! Do they fight much? How do they look?" "Fight?" said Dafydd. "Yes, they fight always; fight for a love that's in it. When they do not be fighting the men of Spain, they're at killing amongst themselves. Lithe as snakes they are, and quick and quiet and brown as ferrets; the very devil for getting out of sight before a man might get a shot at them. "But they're a brave, strong people with the fear in them for only two things —dogs and slavery." Dafydd

was immersed in his tale. “Why, boy, can you think what they would be doing to a man that might get himself taken in a skirmish? They stick him full of long jungle thorns from his head to his toes, and on the thick end of every thorn a ball of fluff like wool. Then the poor captive man stands in a circle of naked savages while they set light to the fluff. And that Indian that does not be singing while he burns there like a torch, is cursed and called a coward. Now, can you imagine any white man doing that? “But dogs they fear, because the Spaniards hunt them with huge mastiffs when they’re at slave gathering for the mines; and slavery is horrible to them. To go chained body to body into the wet earth, year on the crown of year, until they die of the damp ague—rather would they be singing under the burning thorns, and dying in a flame.” He paused and stretched

his thin hands into the fireplace until they were nearly touching the blaze. The light which had come into his eyes as he talked died out again. "Oh, I'm tired, Robert—so very tired," he sighed, "but there's one thing I want to tell you before I sleep. Maybe the telling will ease me, and maybe I can speak it out and then forget about it for the one night. I must go back to the damned place. I can never stay away from the jungle any more, because its hot breath is on me. Here, where I was born, I shiver and freeze. A month would find me dead. This valley where I played and grew and worked has cast me out for a foul, hot thing. It cleans itself of me with the cold. "Now will you be giving me a place to sleep, with thick covers to keep my poor blood moving; and in the morning I'll be off again." He stopped and his face flexed with pain. "I used to love the winter so." Old

Robert helped him from the room with a hand under his arm, then came and sat again by the fire. He looked at the boy who lay unmoving on the floor. "What are you thinking about now, son?" he asked very softly after a time. And Henry drew his gaze back from the land beyond the blaze. "I'm thinking I'll be wanting to go soon, father." "I know, Henry. The whole of this long year I've seen it growing in you like a strong tree—London or Guinea or Jamaica. It comes of being fifteen and strong, with the passion for new things on you. Once I saw the valley grow smaller and smaller, too, until finally it smothered me a little, I think. But aren't you afraid of the knives, son, and the poisons, and the Indians? Do not these things put fear on you?" "No-o-o," Henry said slowly. "Of course not—and how could they? The words have no meaning to you at all.

But the sadness of Dafydd, and the hurt of him, and his poor, sick body— aren't you afraid of those? Do you want to go about the world weighed down with such a heart?" Young Henry considered long. "I would not be like that," he said at last. "I would be coming back very often for my blood's sake." His father went on smiling valiantly. "When will you be off, Henry? It will be lonely here without you." "Why, I'll go, now, as soon as I may," said Henry; and it seemed that he was the older and Robert a little boy. "Henry, will you do two things for me before you go? Will you be thinking to-night of the long sleeplessness I'll have because of you, and of how lost my days will be. And will you remember the hours your mother will fret about your underclothing and the state of your religion. That's the first thing, Henry; but second, will you go up to old Merlin on the crag-top

to-morrow and tell him of your going and listen to his words? He is wiser than you or I may ever be. There is a kind of magic he practices which may be a help to you. Will you do these two things, son?" Henry had become very sad. "I would like to stay, my father, but you know—" "Yes, boy." Robert nodded. "It is my sorrow that I do know. I cannot be angry nor forbid your going, because I understand. I wish I might prevent it and whip you, thinking that I helped you. But go to bed, Henry, and think and think when the light is out and the dark in around you." Old Robert sat dreaming in his chair after the boy had gone. "Why do men like me want sons?" he wondered. "It must be because they hope in their poor beaten souls that these new men, who are their blood, will do the things they were not strong enough nor wise enough nor brave enough to

do. It is rather like another chance with life; like a new bag of coins at a table of luck after your fortune is gone. Perhaps the boy is doing what I might have done had I been brave enough years past. Yes, the valley has smothered me, I think, and I am glad this boy of mine finds it in his power to vault the mountains and stride about the world. But it will be—so very lonely here without him."

"Yes, I have read *Cup of Gold* in full," replied Naylor. "It is truly the Great American Novel without a doubt. If only more people would read it."

"That may be true,, but I have a sneaking suspicion, professor, that this fellow Steinbeck has even greater things in store for the future. You see, I

am greatly invested in literature. I have even dabbled in writing myself."

"Have you, sergeant?"

"I have a manuscript for a short story in my breast pocket here." He patted his breast. "I ain't never shown it to nobody, but I'm figurin' that since we're gettin' to be so friendly that I'll let you have a sneak peek."

The professor really had no interest in reading the sergeant's story, but before he could object the manuscript was in his hands (grateful, the professor was, that the pages were semen-free). It read as follows:

LAST WEDNESDAY

Last Tuesday, I went to the deli, got a sandwich, went to the massage parlor, got a rub, went home and got as good a sleep as I could get. No different from any other Tuesday these past five years of my life (outside of election days and times the deli was closed for repair), but I bring it up because it segues perfectly into the next day—when I got up, went to work, went to an island, and I first met a woman whose name is Sabrina.

My name is something or another—you can find it under "Contributing Photographers" on the third page of a magazine that always seems to be rebranding itself. It rebrands itself in that the name changes, and the font may change, but the main focus (if not the sole focus) is always sex. Last week it was *Snake Babes*—babes posing with snakes. When I first

signed on with Sorensen, the magazine was called *For Suave Guys*. Before much longer, it was *Flesh Master*, then *Strange Tang*, *Future Tang*, *Voyeur Quarterly* (that one never made it to print), *Invisible Bikini*, along with a mixed bag of bondage-themed titles.

All the while, Sorensen has remained as the editor in chief, and the studio has ran steady as a streetfront lot that could be easily mistaken as hole-in-the-wall bar from the outside. It still has the sign from when we were *Cuckold's Haven* two weeks ago.

"I need you to sign this," Sorensen said when I checked in last Wednesday.

I snatched a piece of paper from the air. It was a habit of his to throw things at people like running a workplace was a cornhole game. "What is it?"

"It's a waiver—in case you get bitten by one of the snakes. You're fired if you don't sign it."

I started to read it over, then I looked up, around the studio lobby. In the bright corner there were two watching women, leaning against the wall in the voguest sky-blue silk suits, and sporting big hair, the color of the red sun. They must have been twins, because the only thing telling them apart was that one of them helf a chubby ash-heap of a cigar between her fawnish fingers.

I didn't linger on them. My eyes drifted to the darker corners where corners were poncho raincoats, covered in juice, hung on a phallic rack. In one of the other dark corners, there was some kind of machine that looked like an iron lung for triple-G breasts. There is probably gonorrhea built into that

place as there is brick and mortar. I didn't have to worry about snakes.

"Or you could not sign it then sue me for wrongful termination, but already you signed another waiver for that," Sorensen said. "Might as well sign this one. And—yes— some of the snakes are venomous. If you're a man, you won't mind."

Whenever I think of Sorensen, I think of a bloating, balding pig who spends half his day zipping and unzipping his fly. The stock image of a porn king.

But Sorensen isn't all like that. His hair looks like a toupee but I give him the benefit of the doubt. He's probably only one or two pounds overweight, and he doesn't have a fly to zip because he's always dressed in racquetball gear. I would also say calling him a "porno king" is a stretch, because he only knows

profit the way that I've vaguely retained his explanation of racquetball.

I still think of Sorensen as a bloating, balding pig, though, because he's a rotten bastard on the inside.

He called out to the two women in the bright corner, "Excuse me, ladies, could one of you lend your back for my employee to sign this important document on?"

One of them cursed his mother, and the other told him to get a clipboard.

"I need a pen, too," I said

Sorensen disappeared to his office, saying nothing.

The two women let a few moments pass before they approached me. The one with the cigar looked me over.

She took her stogie out of her mouth. “I’m Jenna Whitetip.”

“I’m Justine,” the other said.

They had an accent and it was somewhere between Ulster and Leinster.

There was hardly any stench from Justine’s cigar, because it was overpowered by the strong perfumes they both wore. I smelled fresh strawberry and coconut, but I couldn’t tell which was wearing which.

Jenna pointed to a shark jumping out of the water—her lapel pin.

“We’re from the Shark Society,” she said.

“Our father owns the Louth Bank. They’re financing this mag, now,” Justine said

“Ireland is an overlooked tax haven.”

I’ll have to tell my landlady, I thought.

I told them I was the head photographer. I'm not—as a matter of fact, I don't know who is—but the twins told me they had been looking for me.

"This'll be the shoot of your lifetime,"

"We just need to leave before that bastard comes back."

"Leave?"

It was when Jenna put her hand on my shoulder that I realized the Whitetip twins were much taller than me. "Forget about the waiver, the studio. You're shooting remote today. Car's waiting around the corner. Your camera's waiting in the trunk. And Sabrina—well, she's waiting beyond the sea."

"Two thousand dollars waiting beyond the sea," Justine added.

I wasn't sure if the Irish mob or the IRA recruited women—surely not women in sky-blue silk suits. I wasn't sure who Sabrina was. I had no idea what the Shark Society was, nor the Louth Bank, or why they were offering me two thousand dollars in an off-shore account.

All I knew was that these two women that were much taller than me were hauling me out around the corner into a sleak, silver SS 1.

"I suppose you have a lot more questions," Jenna said as she took the passenger seat. Justine slid up next to be in the back. "We'll have plenty of time to answer them in the submarine."

"This is the guy?" the driver asked Justine. Justine nodded, and the SS 1 left the road behind in the same moment.

"This is our little sister, Laurie," Jenna told me.

"Laurie doesn't have big red hair like you do."

She had short black hair, and a beet red t-shirt in lieu of a suit.

"Yes, she's different. That's why she's the driver."

As Laurie—going about eighty—turned to scowl at Jenna and maybe get a better look at me, I noticed she didn't have the Shark Society pin either, but a special baseball cap with the logo. She probably didn't wear perfume either. If she had been, it was lost in the mist of strawberry and coconut.

"You're very observant, aren't you?" Jenna shouted over the engine and the swinging jazz on the radio. "The thing you said about the hair, I mean. Must come with the job."

The SS 1 crossed the bridge out of downtown, and took a junction on to a path flocked by sand and weeds.

“You’re mocking me.”

“You’re more observant than I thought. Can you tell the two of us apart?”—she flipped her finger between herself and Justine—“Justine’s the one with the cigar. She smokes enough for the both of us.”

The path sloped upward into a spiral around a hill engulfed with thickets on thickets.

“I noticed.”

“She also has a birthmark on her—well, you’ll see up there.” She gestured to the grand aquamarine gates upon the imminent hilltop. “Point Basking.”

That’s what the sign said.

THE END

"That's it?" the professor bemoaned.

"What do you mean 'that's it'?"

"I just mean that it ends rather abruptly."

Casey snatched back the pages and shoved them in his breast pocket. "Abrupt endings are the new style. Don't you read the fiction in *The New Yorker*? Sherwood Anderson, Robert M. Coates?"

"I'm afraid I don't read much fiction except for a novel here and there, sergeant. I concentrate most of my time on research papers."

Casey frowned. "That's right. You're a big-shot, fancy *scientist*." He spoke the word as if it were a slur. In many ways, it was. "Move out of the way, ladies and gentleman, Doctor Arrowsmith is in the building!

What are you doing here anyways? Why is a man of science so interested in a murder case?"

Naylor pointed to the road. "Hey, what was what? Something's bolting down the road!"

"It was a dog. Biggest I ever saw."

"That wasn't a dog. Quick, keep the lights on it. Do you notice anything? Notice that color; the peculiar gay. The fangs, and the way it moved. Doesn't that remind you of a wolf?"

Casey stopped the car.

"Let's go after it."

"No," the professor prodded. "It's no use. It's dark, and we'll ever find it in this big grove."

Casey frowned. "I guess you're right." He pondered for a solid minute. "Do you really think it was a wolf?"

"It reminded me of one."

"We don't have wolves in Cone City."

"Well, sergeant, I think it's time I told you what kind of research I intend doing. Do you know what lycanthropy is?"

"No, can't say I do."

"It's a form of madness. A disease of the mind. Those afflicted imagine they've turned into wild animals. They develop a taste for blood, and often commit violence when the spasm seizes them. Once the seizure is over, they return to normalcy—no knowledge of what occurred."

"Sounds pretty horrible."

"Yes, it is horrible. You understand there is no physical change except a deepening of the voice—as far as we know."

"What do you mean 'as far as we know'?"

"Some authorities believe the disease may be so deeply rooted that in certain human beings that when the spasm seizes them, their actual appearance is altered. They take on the form as well as the habit of wild beasts. They are called werewolves; men who turn into wolves."

The sergeant jumped.

"What's the matter, sergeant? Why did you jump? Did something scare you?"

"It kind of hit me. The bloodhounds not picking up any animal scent, and that gray thing running down the road."

"Now, now, we mustn't jump to conclusions, sergeant. No true werewolves have ever been found. There have been many alleged eyewitness accounts

claiming that these creatures have been seen—particularly in the Balkan countries in Europe. So far, though, we have no positive scientific proof that werewolves really exist."

"I hope they don't."

"So do I, sergeant. I devoutly hope so. The case of this young man whose throat was torn out presents some aspects that lead me to speculate, however. "

"I'm beginning to see what you're thinking about."

"I suggest we drive on to the Unger farm, sergeant."

5

Naylor approached the door of the Unger house and knocked on it.

He turned to the sergeant. “How old a man would you say he is?”

“Oh, 85, 90.”

Naylor knocked again. “There doesn’t seem to be anyone home.”

“There’s a light upstairs—hold on I think he’s coming to the window.”

A voice called out from above “Yes? Who is it?”

“It’s Sergeant Casey from the police.”

“Just a second.”

The sergeant turned to the professor. “Don’t be afraid when you see him, professor, he’s not too pretty to look at.”

The door creaked open.

“Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Unger, but—”

“What do you want?”

“This is Professor Naylor. He’s helping me with the investigation.”

The professor stuck out his hand. “I’m pleased to meet you, Mr. Unger.”

Unger stiffed him. “Yes? What is it?”

“Can we come in?” the sergeant asked.

“I was just going to bed.”

"We'll be just a few minutes."

"Very well."

Mr. Unger let them in.

"We'd like to ask you a few questions," the sergeant said.

"Sick and tired of answering questions. I've told you all I know. What more do you want?"

"You see here, Mr. Unger," the professor answered, "my business here is purely scientific. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the police."

"Is it now?"

"I am merely trying to determine whether the attack on the young man was made by a human or an animal." He paused for dramatic effect "…or perhaps a combination of both."

Unger cocked an eyebrow. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, egghead.”

“Well, you’ve heard of werewolves, have you not, Mr. Unger?”

“No, and I’m not interested. I told you, I’ve had enough of questions. Hasn’t a man a right to a little privacy?”

“Woah, don’t get your panties in a bunch,” Casey shot back.

“I don’t like being questioned! I don’t like having people barging in on me at all hours of the night. This is my house, and I get to live in it the way I see fit, which means without uninvited visitors. This is a warning: the next person—man, woman, or child—who sets foot on my land is gonna get a load of buckshot. Is that clear?”

The sergeant scowled. “You’re in bad humor tonight, Unger.”

“Never mind my bad humor. Get out. Both of you. Get out and stay out.”

A female voice called out from the top of the stairs. “Rupert, what’s goin’ on down there?”

“Daisy!” Mr. Unger called back. “What the fuck are you doing out of bed?”

She began to descend the steps.

“Don’t you fucking dare come down those stairs! I’ll fuck you up like the bitch you are!”

“I wanted to find out if you were asking about my lamb—the one that—”

Mr. Unger let out a shrill scream that made both Casey and Naylor go deaf for a minute. Rattled, Daisy retreated back to her bed.

"I presume that was your sister," the professor said to the Unger man.

"Yes, it was. Now, get off my property and don't come back unless you are invited." The Unger man pushed the professor and the sergeant out the door and slammed it shut.

"What a cocksucker!" the professor exclaimed.

"You're telling me," the sergeant concurred. "He has a pretty sister, though. Did you hear how he screamed at her?"

"Yes, and she said something about lambs being killed. Isn't that interesting?"

"You're right. Perhaps we should ask the hired man how many have been killed."

"Werewolves are supposedly fond of slaughtering sheep. The hired man is a Negro, is that correct?"

"That is correct. He lives in that rickety shack over there." The sergeant gestured to a rickety shack.

The two men waltzed over to the shack and opened the door without knocking. They should have knocked, however, because the Negro had been choking the bishop.

"What do you fellows want?" The Negro, whose name was Amos, asked kindly as he zipped up his trousers.

"We want to ask you some questions," the sergeant said.

"I'm all ears, and hopefully I will be able to satisfy any and all inquiries that you may possess."

"Where were you when that boy was killed?"

"Why, dear sir, I was partaking in the revelry that can only be found at the annual Strawberry Jazz Festival in Salinas."

"There is no annual Strawberry Jazz Festival in Salinas!" the professor interjected.

"That's right!" the sergeant agreed. "And I think that's enough evidence for even an amateur detective. Amos, you're under arrest for homicide."

"Balls!"

Casey cuffed Amos and dragged him out to the patrol car. Just as the three men were about to drive back to the station, a female voice called out.

"Wait, Mr. Naylor! Mr. Casey!"

It was the innkeeper.

"What are you doing here?" Naylor asked.

"I want to marry you."

“Well, hot dog!”

And so ended the history of Professor Naylor, for he and the innkeeper were wed the next day, and married men do not have histories—only a record.

6

Naylor wrote a diary entry for that day as soon as he got home:

It was just another lazy Monday in my office when—all of a sudden—my secretary, Gypsy, barged in on me masturbating at my desk.

"Profess—oh, I'll come back in minute"

Her face was as red as a frisbee. I could tell by the way she grimaced that she was disgusted with me. I

have a certain intuition when it comes to reading faces (a natural gift from ever since I was a young lad, growing up on my father's farm—I could even tell what emotions the pigs were feeling just by the twinkle in their eye). In any case, I zipped up my trousers, and pretended that nothing had happened.

"No, no, Gypsy, you obviously have something important to tell me. Please, do."

"I think it can wait."

"Tell me right this minute or I will fire you!"

She was holding a newspaper clipping, and without saying a word she placed it on my desk, then dashed out of my office, slamming the door behind her. I read the clipping, then made up my mind to visit the Cone City police station.

"Gypsy," I shouted. "Please arrange for me to take a trip to Cone City!"

It was a long drive from Stanford to Cone City—about three consecutive days, no stops.

Finally I got there. I was welcomed with a red carpet. I was treated like a prince.

"I'm afraid I have nothing to tell you, Professor Naylor, except that it happened five weeks ago," the policeman told me.

He was smoking a cigar. He had the harsh voice of a long time smoker. He was also obese. He also had a mustache that was truly an eyesore. He was an unpleasant man to look at and hear.

"The police moved in on the case right after the boy's body was found. We didn't get very far," the policeman continued.

I stood opposite his desk.

"I see. You know, of course, why I'm here, sergeant," I finally spoke in my typical robust tone.

"Well, all I know is we got a letter from the state university saying you were coming down for some research on the case." The sergeant produced a piece of paper that was smudged with some white goop, and waved it in the air.

"Yes, yes, exactly—and the name of the university is Stanford. It's a very famous school. The great writer John Steinbeck went there. Now, as I understand it, sergeant, the boy's throat was considerably lacerated?"

"Worse than that. There was no throat left." The sergeant slipped the piece of paper back in its

assigned drawer, then pantomimed what he had just said.

"You're convinced it was an animal?"

"What else could it be? No human could rip a throat open like that."

"Were there any tracks?" I asked. I was pacing around the room, appraising the many artworks that decorated the walls of the policeman's office. All paintings of ancient men with their unmentionables hung out to dry. The man sure had an affinity for the male figure, the professor thought to himself. Alas, these homoerotic works were blatant forgeries, which was quite comical.

"No, the ground was pretty hard," Sergeant Casey—whom may or may not have been inclined to the Florentine persuasion— answered. "What

stopped us cold was that our bloodhounds could not pick up a trace of scent."

"What about *humans*?" I asked

"Only the Ungers and the hired man, Amos—but they don't count. It happened on the Unger ranch, and naturally you'd expect—"

"Yes, yes, of course," I concurred. "There is absolutely no way that it could have been any of them, and we are both right about this. Now, tell me, this Unger you mentioned—"

"His name is Rupert."

"I don't remember asking," I shot back. "Now, this Rupert that you mentioned. Does he keep a dog? A *savage* dog?"

"No," Casey said. "There aren't any dogs in Cone City. Everyone here is allergic to them, for some

reason. I think it's because of inbreeding, but that's just my own personal theory. I'm not a scientist like you are."

"No, you certainly aren't. Now, why don't you tell me where the Unger farm is located? I'd much rather like to get a survey of the scene myself."

"It happens to be located on the outskirts of town, professor, by the Lucida Swamp. You can get there by the county road. I'll drive you in my automobile if you're up for it." The policeman winked in my general direction.

I began to feel queasy, so I asked for a reprieve to the latrine. In the latrine, I threw up a little bit. After a thorough scrubbing of the hands I regressed into the office.

"Well, how about my offer?" the policeman inquired once more.

"I'd like to know a few more things, first," I said. "The boy. Did he work at the Unger farm?"

"No, no, no. According to Unger's story, the boy, Nick, had a wild crush of young lust over the Unger girl, Daisy. On Tuesday, the two young lusters had a rendezvous under the eaves of the full moon, until Rupert rained on their lust parade. He says that Nick left the farm around nine-thirty. A minute later, he heard him screaming for help. Rupert ran out from the back of the house, found Nick dead along the traveler's road. Blood and guts littered everywhere as if the gore circus came to town."

"I'd like to have a real talk with this Unger man."

The policeman threw away his cigar, then lit another one—covered in the same white goop that the paper had been.

"I don't know, professor," he responded. "He's a hard, brooding man who doesn't take much to strangers. He doesn't take much to anybody as a matter of fact. You might even call him a 'queer duck'."

"Really?"

"He spends most of his time taking care of his farm and his sheeps. He keeps one hired mana—Amos, whom I despise because he is a Negro and I am racist. For the two of them, they manage the farm pretty well. Then, there's his young sister, Daisy, whom the young boy, Nick, was lusting after. Rupert doesn't let her out of his sight. Pretty much keeps her cooped up in the house like Rapunsel. She doesn't

have long blonde hair like Rapunsel though. She has dark hair, and it's about the average length a young girl would wear—"

"I get the point sergeant," I said. "I think I'll take you up on your offer. How about we drive up to the farm tonight?"

"Tonight? It'll be dark if we go there at night."

"You're not afraid of the dark, are you?"

The policeman glared. "I'm not afraid of anything I can see. What time?"

I looked at my watch. "It's four o'clock. We'll convene at eight."

3

Professor Naylor gazed at his golden watch again. It said two, so it was really six. Just about time for *Night Creeps* starring Bill Pratt. He was lumbering in the single bed of the hotel room Sergeant Casey had rented out for him. The Rising Sun Inn, it was called. He stayed in room number twelve.

The policeman arranged a room for me at a place called The Rising Sun Inn, so I got in my jalopy, ready to drive there, then realized I had no directions. I

asked the policeman for directions, and he gave them to me. I looked to the skies as I drove along the desolate road from the station. The clouds signaled the greyest shade of gray I had ever seen, but I was sure that it would not rain. My jalopy has no roof.

Cone City is a sparse town, so most of my journey was along a dirt road between two dark, endless oceans of wood. After about an hour of driving, I spotted a hitchhiker. He was a weary Indian dressed in rags.

"Going my way?" I said, after pulling over.

He hiccupped. I noticed he had a half empty bottle of whiskey clutched in his hand.

"I'm sorry," I interjected before he could answer. "I'm sure that you are aware that the beverage you are carrying is outlawed under the Volstead Act. I am

just leaving from the police station, and I can not be associated with lathered scum of the earth such as you."

I contemplated picking him up and driving back to the police station, but nixed the idea after I noticed that he had soiled his person.

"Bad day," I told him. "Not good day. *Bad* day." Then I sped off—but as I sped off a simmering rage boiled inside me. Overwhelmed was I by an impulsive desire to turn around and dash that drunkard over. No one would have caught me, but I decided against it on moral grounds.

An hour later, it began to rain right as arrived at the inn. I proceeded to my vehicle beneath a canopy of brush, then ran to the inn.

He had been driving up the beaten path to this inn a mere two hours before when the sky commenced rainfall. His jalopy had no roof, and he had no parasol handy, so tragedy occurred. The tragedy, of course, was him getting wet from the rain. The inn looked like a Japanese temple. Its roof curved thin like the beak of a bird whom was knocked on its back. Unlike the robin red and stark black temples, though, this hotel was doused in a ridiculous shade of blue not unlike the color found on the plumes of a jaybird. It was dropped against an army of the most unremarkable redwoods. There was a grove off a ways, where he parked his jalopy beneath the refuge of long branches, lest it stay out in the rain.

"Oh, you pig, sir!" cried the innkeeper. "You dog! You are dripping, sir!"

She confronted me.

"Why are you dripping, sir?"

"I am dripping because of the rain."

"Could you drip somewhere else?"

"Well, I could, ma'am, but I have a room that was booked here by Sergeant Casey earlier today. My name is Naylor."

"Oh," she said. She looked embarrassed. "Goodness," she continued. "Please, forgive me. I hadn't a clue. If I had known it was you, I would not have burst out in such a brash and abrasive manner. Is there any way I can make it up to you? Perhaps I could offer you something."

"What would you be willing to do?"

"Oh, I'd do *anything*."

I asked if could fellate me for a moment to which she kindly obliged.

"Was that satisfactory?" she asked.

"Much," I replied.

She gave me my room key, and I carried my heavy luggage to my room all by myself. 'Twas a mighty fine looking room.

I glared at my watch. It was about time for *Night Creeps* starring Bill Pratt! So I turned on the bedside radio.

"Welcome to *Night Creeps*," Pratt's voice confided to me. "I'm Bill Pratt, master of horror on the screen and the airwaves. The Alpha and Omega of suspense, terror, and extolling the virtues of Goodyear Asbestos—our sponsor."

I grinned at this and pounded his chest like an ape, as I am a loyal customer of Goodyear Asbestos.

"On tonight's c*h-ch-chilling* episode," Pratt's voice continued, "the prevailing theme is that of wrath. You are about to hear a story that wallows in the filthy mire of mankind's darkest, filthiest emotion: the unending quest for a tooth to avenge another tooth. Wrathfulness, that is."

My eyes widened.

"I will star as Teddy Morgan, a man who waited fifty years locked away from all light and life in a cage before setting out to reap his vengeance on those who earned it. And when the reaping came, he stalked his prey with the malice and forethought of an *ice leopard!* That is why our story tonight is called: 'The Ice Leopard'."

A dissonant fanfare of the oboe sang then faded out into the sound of pouring rain. Pratt narrated:

Our scene is the warden's office at the state penitentiary. A middle-aged man, his shoulders hunched and his hair prematurely gray, stands before the warden's desk, closed in an ill-fitting prison-made suit. His face is yellowed with the powder of long confinement, but his eyes, shut deeply in dark, shadowed hollows, are bright and clear.

Looking a thim, the warden speaks:

WARDEN: Well, I wish you'd reconsider, Teddy. I don't like to see you walk out here in your condition.

TEDDY: I'll be alright, warden.

WARDEN: Don't be a fool. You've just gotten over a bad case of pneumonia. Why not spend the next week

or so in the hospital? Let Doc Reeves put you back on your feet.

TEDDY: My time is up at noon today, isn't it?

WAREN: Yes, but—

TEDDY: That's when I'm leaving—the moment that noon whistle blows.

WARDEN: You're in no shape to travel. Look at'cha, you're still sick, man; deathly sick.

TEDDY: I've been sick for almost fifty years, warden. Ever since those iron gates out there closed behind me. I've waited a lifetime for the cure—planned for it—now I'm going to get it.

WARDEN: Oh, you're just being stubborn, Teddy. I don't understand it. You've been a model prisoner in every way. In the entire history of the penitentiary, only three men had life sentences commuted—and

you're one of them. Yet, in a matter concerning your well-being, you act like an obstinate fool. Why?

TEDDY: Because I've got something to do. Something very important.

WARDEN: What's more important than your health?

TEDDY: The thing I've got to do.

WARDEN: Wait a minute, are you going to do something that will land you back in here? Is that it?

TEDDY: Don't worry, warden.

WARDEN: You know, come to think of it, Teddy, there's something I've always wanted to ask you. Something personal.

TEDDY: Go ahead.

WARDEN: In all the years that you've been here, why have you refused to see visitors or mail? Why have

you completely cut yourself off from the outside world.

TEDDY: Well, it all boils down to this. A man ages a lot in fifty years. His voice changes, and his way of talking. His features change. He becomes an entirely different person. Especially in a place like this. Just knowing that you're hemmed in by four walls, it does something to you—something, well—that's the answer.

WARDEN: That's no answer at all.

TEDDY: Yes, it is. I didn't want anyone to see me age, to see the changes that were coming over me. The way it is now, the Teddy Morgan who is walking out of here at seventy-eight is nothing like the Teddy Morgan that was brought in at twenty-seven. They're

two different people. No one outside this prison will ever recognize me.

WARDEN: Now, is that what you want?

TEDDY: That's exactly what I want.

WARDEN: Why? You've got nothing to be ashamed of. You paid your debt to society.

TEDDY: There's another debt I have to pay. To myself. It's been growing for a long time. A long, long, lonely time.

WARDEN: I don't like the way you're talking, Teddy. What's behind all this?

TEDDY: Fifty years, warden. The best part of my life. A minute ago, you asked me to look at myself. I don't have to look. I can feel it down inside. I'm an old man. An old man at seventy-eight.

WARDEN: Self-pity isn't a bad thing, Teddy.

TEDDY: I'm not pitying myself. I'm thinking about what brought me here. You've got the record right there in front of you. I said I was innocent then, and it still holds. I'm innocent now.

WARDEN: That's a closed book. Why not let it stay closed?

TEDDY: Because there's an unfinished chapter still to be written.

WARDEN: Remember, you haven't stayed your full time. You'll be on probation for five years—and when I say probation, I *do* mean probation.

TEDDY: I'll remember. I've had a long time to think it over.

WARDEN: Incidentally, while we're at it, there's one more thing that's been puzzling me. I mean, befuddling me.

TEDDY: You better hurry. It's almost noon.

WARDEN: Six months ago, when it seemed pretty certain that your commutation was coming through, you made a strange request; you asked to be relieved of the job of running the prison library—a job you've held as far back as I can remember. You asked me to assign you as an apprentice of the prison barber. I granted that request, but I wondered about it at the time. Would you care to tell me why you suddenly decided to become a barber?

TEDDY: I thought it might be a good idea to learn a trade.

WARDEN: That's not true, Teddy.

[whistle sounds]

TEDDY: There's the noon whistle. That means I'm a free man, doesn't it?

WARDEN: Yes.

TEDDY: Goodbye, warden. Take care of myself.

WARDEN: You haven't answered my question, Teddy.

TEDDY: You mean why did I suddenly decide to become a barber?

WARDEN: Yes.

TEDDY: I told you. I wanted to learn a trade.

WARDEN: And I told you that's not the truth.

TEDDY: You're right, warden. It isn't.

[oboe begins to play, indicating a new scene]

I missed this interval of the broadcast because I had to answer the call of nature.

[door opens]

DALLAS: Well, what'd'cha learn?

WOMAN: It's true, Dallas! They commuted his sentence. He got out yesterday.

DALLAS: Balls! I spend a hundred grand a year on smart word, and where do I get my information? A couple of hopheads and a barber!

DEWEY: But Dallas—

DALLAS: I'm out of my mind, you says. I don't know what I'm talking about. Teddy Morgan's dead. He died in prison ten years ago. I got nothing to worry about. Balls!

HUEY: Well, that's what they told us.

DALLAS: Who told ya?

DEWEY: Our sources of information.

DALLAS: Your sources of information. Balls! Don't make me laugh.

HUEY: Now, look, Dallas—

DALLAS: Get out before I lose my temper. Get out I said!

[door slams]

DALLAS: *[mutters]* Their sources of information. *[shouts]* Woman, get me a drink!

WOMAN: Aw, Dallas, daddy, don't get yourself so upset.

DALLAS: Shut up.

WOMAN: Aw, Dal—

DALLAS: Shut up and stay out of this. None of your business.

WOMAN: Is that a nice way to talk? Who is this Teddy Morgan?

DALLAS: I said it's none of your business.

[door bell rings]

DALLAS: What the duke was that?

WOMAN: Just the door bell. I'll answer it.

DALLAS: Wait a minute.

WOMAN: Now what?

DALLAS: Don't open that door until you find out who it is.

WOMAN: Of all the—

DALLAS: You heard me. Find out who it is, first.

WOMAN: Okay. Who is it? Who is it? No answering.

DALLAS: Balls. It's Morgan trying to trick me.

WOMAN: Dallas, you're white as a sheet.

DALLAS: Take it easy; keep your voice down. Now, listen to me. In case anything happens, he threatened me. I had to protect myself. You understand?

WOMAN: Dallas, what are you doing with that gun?

DALLAS: Never mind. You just follow orders. All right, open the door—slowly.

WOMAN: Dallas, come on—

DALLAS: Open it, I said.

[door opens slowly]

WOMAN: Nobody here.

DALLAS: What's that on the floor?

WOMAN: Rat! A dead rat!

[oboe begins to play, indicating a new scene]

[telephone rotates]

DEWEY: Hullo?

HUEY: Dewey? It's me, Huey. Did you hear about Dallas?

DEWEY: Boy, did I. Somebody left a dead rat outside his door.

HUEY: No, that was yesterday. I mean today.

DEWEY: What about today? Did he get another one?

HUEY: Yeah. It came in a box in the mail.

DEWEY: Holy smokes.

HUEY: He's planning on ducking out of town. He's scared stiff.

DEWEY: Where's he going?

HUEY: Up to his hideout in the mountains.

[oboe begins to play, indicating a new scene]

[sound of engine running; tires screeching]

DALLAS: All right, take the car out to the back, Chewy.

CHEWY: Okey-dokey, boss.

WOMAN: What about the bags, babe?

DALLAS: Chewy will bring 'em.

[footfall sounds as they walk]

WOMAN: How long have you had this place in the mountains, Dallas?

DALLAS: Oh, a couple of years.

WOMAN: Ooh, sure is ghouly-looking.

DALLAS: Well, what did you expect, a summer resort? All I wanted was a place to hole up, lay low while the boys get Morgan. Balls, there should be a bell around here.

WOMAN: Somebody in the house?

DALLAS: Don't you ever get tired of asking questions, woman? I told you on the way up, there's a caretaker. Balls, the bell doesn't work. *[pounds the door]*

WOMAN: If you ask me, this is a whole lot of cra—

DALLAS: Nobody's asking you.

WOMAN: Dallas Macy running away from a stiff mouse.

DALLAS: Pipe down. Somebody's coming.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: Good evening, Mr. Macy.

DALLAS: Oh, good evening. Everything all set?

CARETAKER: Quite, sir. The master bedroom is ready.

DALLAS: Then we'll go right up. This is my woman.

CARETAKER: How do you do?

DALLAS: You're not the same man that was here last year, are you?

CARETAKER: No, sir, that was Rufus, my cousin. He's been ill, and I've been substituting for him. My name is Eddy.

DALLAS: All righty. Bring up a couple of brandies, we'll be upstairs.

[footfall as they climb the stairs]

WOMAN: *[whisper]* I'd hate to be holed up in a place like this for the rest of my life.

DALLAS: Well, just say the word and Chewy will drive you back into town.

WOMAN: Are you kidding?

DALLAS: I'm not in the kidding mood. *[door opens]* Now, see, what's wrong with this room? Four closets. Double exposure.

WOMAN: Very nice. I couldn't ask for anything more.

DALLAS: Close the door.

[door closes]

DALLAS: Now, look, woman. Get one thing straight. I came up here to play safe. That guy's got it out for me, and until he's out of the way, I'm not taking any chances.

WOMAN: I don't get why you're so afraid of this Teddy Morgan guy. What did you do to him? Did you do something bad?

DALLAS: He thinks I set him up, put him behind bars.

WOMAN: Did you?

DALLAS: One of these, woman, you're going to ask the wrong questions.

WOMAN: I know, it's none of my business.

DALLAS: That's your place, now stay there.

WOMAN: Just tell me one thing, Dallas.

DALLAS: What?

[oboe riff]

Pratt's voice chimed in. "You are listening to *Night Creeps* starring me, Bill Pratt. *Night Creeps* as always is sponsored by Goodyear Asbestos—the only asbestos you need to live a happy and healthy life. I myself use Goodyear Asbestos every day. A study conducted by Stanford University last year concluded that those who do not use Goodyear Asbestos are ten

times more likely to be homosexuals. Are you a homosexual?"

I shook my head.

"Good. Now back to our broadcast of 'The Ice Leopard'! Starring me as ex-con Teddy Morgan."

[eerie oboe]

WOMAN: That rat, Dallas. Where did it mean?

DALLAS: What do you think they mean?

WOMAN: I don't know. Got something to do with Teddy Morgan.

DALLAS: Well, you guessed right. Morgan's trying to get me killed. He knows I've got a bad heart. He leaves those things to tell me that I'm a rat. A dead one if he has anything to do with it. But I'm safe up here. The boys will get Morgan.

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yes!

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir, with your brandy.

DALLAS: Ok, come in. Just put that tray down on the table, if you know what I mean.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clanging]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: I guess so.

WOMAN: What about our luggage, Dallas?

DALLAS: Oh, right. Did my man bring the bags up?

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. They're in the hallway, sir.

DALLAS: Well, bring 'em in, will ya?

CARETAKER: Yes, sir.

WOMAN: Soda or water, Dallas?

DALLAS: I'll take it straight

CARETAKER: Where shall I put the bags, sir?

DALLAS: Oh, put them down any place.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clunk]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: Yes. Don't forget to lock up.

CARETAKER: I won't, sir. Good night.

DALLAS: G'night.

WOMAN: G'night.

[door closes]

DALLAS: Oh, that yes-sir-no-sir routine is going to drive me nuts.

WOMAN: He talks like one of those fancy movie butlers.

DALLAS: Looks like a zombie.

WOMAN: I better get the bags unpacked. All the stuff will be wrinkled.

DALLAS: I needed this drink. Maybe I can relax.

WOMAN: Sit down and take it easy.

DALLAS: You know, maybe it won't be so bad staying up here for a week or two.

WOMAN: Hey, how to open this bag, Dallas?

DALLAS: Which one?

WOMAN: Yours. The black leather.

DALLAS: There's a little gadget on the locks. Just press it and it snaps open. Ya got it?

WOMAN: Uh-huh.

DALLAS: We're going to get some good rest and re—

WOMAN: Woah!

DALLAS: What's the matter?

WOMAN: Look! A rat! Another dead rat!

[oboe carries scene out]

DALLAS: Talk, Chewy! Talk you double-dealing dog or I'll cut your skull open!

CHEWY: I didn't do it! Honest!

DALLAS: I know you're kind. I know it from way back. Teddy Morgan set you up to this.

CHEWY: No!

DALLAS: Talk!

CHEWY: I didn't put that dead rat in your bag!

WOMAN: Dallas…

DALLAS: I don't trust you—or you! I don't trust anybody. You're all a bunch of blood-sucking double-crossers. You'd like to see me dead, wouldn't you? Get out of here! Both of you!

[door slams]

DALLAS: And stay out!

[oboe again]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir, with your brandy.

DALLAS: Bring it in.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: This is the second to last bottle, sir.

DALLAS: Put it down.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clinking]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: Yeah, that's all.

[oboe carries scene out]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir, with your brandy.

DALLAS: Bring it in.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: This is the last bottle, sir.

DALLAS: Put it down.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir. *[clinking]* Will that be all, sir?

DALLAS: Yeah, that's all.

[oboe carries scene out]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir.

DALLAS: Come in.

CARETAKER: I thought you'd like something to eat, sir. It's been three days since you've had any solid food

DALLAS: Yeah, three days.

CARETAKER: I brought an omelet and some toast.

DALLAS: Thanks.

CARETAKER: Quite all right, sir.

DALLAS: You've been pretty nice to me, Eddy.

CARETAKER: Thank you, sir.

DALLAS: Yeah, pretty nice. I never forget a guy who has been nice to me, and I don't forget him if he stabs me in the back.

CARETAKER: Neither do I, sir.

[oboe carries scene out]

[knock at door]

DALLAS: Yeah, who is it?

CARETAKER: It's Eddy, sir.

DALLAS: Come in.

CARETAKER: I'm sorry to disturb you, sir.

DALLAS: What have you got there, Eddy?

CARETAKER: I thought that now you're feeling a little better, sir, that perhaps you'd like to be shaved. In almost a week, you haven't.

DALLAS: Don't tell me you're a barber, too.

CARETAKER: I have been a barber, sir.

DALLAS: Well, I could use a shave.

CARETAKER: If I may say so, sir, I think you'll find it very refreshing.

DALLAS: All right, go ahead. Where do you want it?

CARETAKER: The chair you're sitting in will be all right, sir. I'll get some warm water in the bathroom.

[water running]

DALLAS: You know what? I've been thinking. When I go back into town, I'm going to take you with me. Yeah, I could use a man like you.

CARETAKER: That's very kind of you, sir.

DALLAS: I like people like you around me. People who don't ask questions and get in your hair. Take care of what you're supposed to and that's the end of it. You're a mensch, Eddy.

CARETAKER: I try to keep my place, sir.

[water stops running]

DALLAS: You've got the right idea. Now, what do I do? Lean back?

CARETAKER: In just a moment, sir. I'll have to fasten this strap to the back of the chair. I want the razor to be extra sharp.

DALLAS: You need it sharp for this beard.

CARETAKER: Yes, sir.

DALLAS: You must have been wondering about me these past few days, Eddy.

CARETAKER: No, sir. Not particularly.

DALLAS: You mean you wouldn't like to know why I've been hiding out here in the mountains?

CARETAKER: I'm sure you must have a good reason, sir.

DALLAS: Yes, you can say that again. Someone's gunning for me.

CARETAKER: Gunning for you?

DALLAS: Uh-huh. Somebody trying to get me. Guy named Morgan. Teddy Morgan.

CARETAKER: The name sounds familiar.

DALLAS: He got a life sentence for murder. About fifty years ago. Yes, quite a story on it in the papers. He killed a girl.

CARETAKER: Did he?

DALLAS: That's what the jury thought. They gave first degree with a recommendation for mercy. That saved him from the chair.

CARETAKER: What did you think?

DALLAS: What did I think about what?

CARETAKER: Lean back, sir. I'm almost ready for you.

DALLAS: Hey, isn't that razor sharp enough yet?

CARETAKER: Not quite. I haven't used it in some time. What did you think about Teddy Morgan's conviction?

DALLAS: What's the difference what I thought? The jury cooked his goose.

CARETAKER: Did they?

DALLAS: Yeah. Come on, Eddy. If you're going to shave, you better get to it.

CARETAKER: I'm ready now. Lean back, sir. I'll soak you up.

DALLAS: Okay.

CARETAKER: I assume this Teddy Morgan is out of prison now.

DALLAS: Yeah, got a commutation. Hey, you sure you don't need a lawn mower to get this beard off?

CARETAKER: I can do very well with a razor, sir.

DALLAS: You know, I'm going to feel like a new man when I get through.

CARETAKER: Yes, a completely new man.

DALLAS: Ah, you're a funny guy, Eddy. You talk like a college professor.

CARETAKER: I've had a lot of time to read and study in the past fifty years. A lot of time.

DALLAS: Yeah?

CARETAKER: That's enough soak. Now, just relax, sir. *[etching]* Does the razor prune?

DALLAS: Nope, feels all right.

CARETAKER: That's fine. Nothing like a good sharp razor.

DALLAS: Yeah.

CARETAKER: Now, don't move. It's rather difficult shaving you in this chair. If you move I may cut your throat.

DALLAS: That's not funny.

CARETAKER: It wasn't meant to be funny, Dallas.

DALLAS: What did you say?

CARETAKER: Sit back, Dallas. One slip and you're finished. You're a dead rat.

DALLAS: Teddy Morgan.

CARETAKER: That's right. It's been a long time, hasn't it, Dallas?

DALLAS: Teddy, Teddy, you wouldn't kill me in cold blood, would you?

CARETAKER: This isn't cold blood, Dallas. This hot blood, heated for fifty years. That's how long I've waited. Feel how sharp the razor is.

DALLAS: No, no, Teddy.

CARETAKER: Be careful. It doesn't take much to slit a throat from ear to ear. You know that.

DALLAS: Teddy, I'll give you anything you want. Name your price.

CARETAKER: You couldn't meet it. Only one thing can pay for those torrid years.

DALLAS: Teddy, I've got a bad heart, you know.

CARETAKER: Yes, so I've heard.

DALLAS: All I'm asking for is a break.

CARETAKER: Did you give me a break when you framed me and set me up for life?

DALLAS: I figured you'd beat the rap. I never thought they'd convict you.

CARETAKER: Then you admit framing me.

DALLAS: Yeah, yeah, but I never figured—

CARETAKER: You admit killing the MacGuire girl because she knew too much, because you wanted her out of the way.

DALLAS: Yeah, but I—

CARETAKER: But nothing. Now, feel the razor on your throat. *[Dallas panting]* Touching, deeper…

DALLAS: No, Teddy!

CARETAKER: Deeper…

[Dallas cries out]

CARETAKER: You said you'd be a new man when this was over, but you're wrong, Dallas. You're only a dead rat.

[knock at door]

CARETAKER: Who is it?

WOMAN: It's me. I've come back.

[door opens]

CARETAKER: Come in, woman.

WOMAN: Oh, hello, Eddy. Is Dallas in here? Oh, there he is. He's shaving. Dallas, darling. I couldn't stay away from you. I couldn't—oh, what's the matter with you? You asleep or something?

CARETAKER: I'm afraid not, woman.

WOMAN: Why are his eyes staring that way? Why doesn't he move?

CARETAKER: Be careful. He's dead.

[woman gasps]

WOMAN: Dead! Oh no…

CARETAKER: Yes, he's dead, and my name isn't Eddy, woman. My name is Teddy Morgan.

WOMAN: Teddy Morgan. That Teddy Morgan.

CARETAKER: Yes.

WOMAN: You killed him.

CARETAKER: No, woman, I didn't. You don't see any blood do you.

WOMAN: *[sobbing]* But he's dead.

CARETAKER: I'm afraid I played rather a gruesome joke on him. You see, I was shaving him a very sharp razor. After I told him who I was, I held back the blade—the dull side—against his throat. As you know, he had a bad heart. Unfortunately, he couldn't stand the strain.

WOMAN: You murdered him. You'll go to jail for this.

CARETAKER: Wrong, woman. Quite wrong. Dallas Macy died of a heart attack. That's what a medical autopsy will show.

WOMAN: You caused it. You brought it on.

CARETAKER: That will be very difficult to prove. I've figured this out so carefully, woman. I've paid with

fifty years of my life for a murder I did not commit—and now there's nothing the law can do to me for one that I did commit.

[oboe closes scene]

Pratt closed the episode with his closed narration: "*Night Creeps* has brought you 'The Ice Leopard' starring myself. Tune in on the station on this station at this time for our *ch-ch-chilling* story, 'The Witch Doctor's Daughter'. I'll star as Sheldon Bloom, an African explorer who is cursed to battle the warriors of the dead!"

I turned off the radio. It was a spooky episode, but I saw the twist where Eddy turned out to be Teddy from a mile away.

I was hungry, so I got some dinner from the innkeeper. It had also stopped raining, so I decided I should drive back out to meet the policeman—

He got writer's cramp and stopped writing.

THE END

JOHN STEINBECK

Frequently cited as America's greatest author, John Steinbeck is known for beloved classics such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden*, and *Of Mice and Men*. Before he found worldwide success, he wrote *Murder at Full Moon* in a time of desperation under the name Peter Pym.